

**STARTING NEW DISCIPLES OF CHRIST CHURCHES ON THE
PACIFIC SLOPE DURING THE DECADE OF
DISCIPLING (1990-1999)**

**A Professional Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry**

**by
Sean P. Harry
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This professional project, completed by

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*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

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Abstract

STARTING NEW DISCIPLES OF CHRIST CHURCHES ON THE PACIFIC SLOPE DURING THE DECADE OF DISCIPLING (1990-1999)

Sean P. Harry

In 1987 the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) established a priority of starting 200 new congregations denomination-wide during the 1990s (Resolution 8763). In light of limited success with the Church Advance Now (CAN) program of the 1980s on the West Coast, Disciples are concerned for the implementation of this priority in Pacific Slope regions.

The Board of Church Extension of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), through a survey by the Church Information and Development Services (CIDS), has selected 270 "key target areas" for new church establishment in the 1990s. Ninety of those top 270 key target areas are located on the West Coast. For Disciples, no other geographic region has such a large number of key target areas. Will Disciples on the West Coast be able to meet the need to establish a significant number of new congregations during the 1990s? The thesis of this project is that the goal of starting a significant number of new Disciples of Christ congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s is possible.

This project is designed to be used by Disciples of Christ leaders to help them: (1) develop a Disciples theology of evangelism, (2) better understand the mission of the Christian Church in the context of the West Coast, (3) explore and adapt models for establishing new churches, and (4) develop leadership for starting new congregations. Each chapter contains a list of questions for

further discussion, and includes a listing of additional resources. Included in Chapter 6 is an outline for a new church development conference. A successful prototype conference was held in January of 1993 for the Northern California-Nevada region.

Acknowledgments

. . . no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.

Mark 2:22 (NIV)

. . . Jesus replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Matthew 17:20 (NIV)

My heartfelt thanks to all who have helped with the creation of this project: my professors and mentors, family members, colleagues and those who believe!

This project is dedicated to the brave and faithful leaders of this decade who will risk their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

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CHAPTER 1

The Need and Problem of Starting New Disciples of Christ Congregations on the Pacific Slope in the 1990s

This project addresses the challenge of establishing new Disciples of Christ congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s.

Importance of the Problem

In 1975 the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) adopted resolution 7569 which set as priority the establishment of 100 new congregations during the decade of the 1980s. The Board of Church Extension (BCE), working in cooperation with the Division of Homeland Ministries (DHM), was given administrative responsibility for oversight of this priority. After some study of past efforts, the BCE launched the Church Advance Now (CAN) campaign to gather support and funding for new congregation development. Denominationally the effectiveness of the CAN program was highly successful with 155 new congregations having been established by January of 1988.¹ On the West Coast over thirteen new congregations were either attempted or established by the regions of Oregon, Washington, Northern California-Nevada,

¹ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Board of Church Extension and Division of Homeland Ministries, New Congregation Establishment, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) [Handbook] (Indianapolis: Board of Church Extension, 1988), 7-9.

and the Pacific Southwest.² Unfortunately the success of the CAN program on the West Coast was short-lived. Only seven out of the thirteen attempted new congregations remain active, and several of these were established outside of the CAN program parameters.³ For example, by June 1992 two of the three congregations established in the 1980s in northern California had either folded or merged with other congregations. The third (Sierra Christian Church in Rocklin) was experiencing some institutional difficulties and was struggling to maintain a budget adequate to support a full-time minister.

In 1987 the General Assembly again established a priority of New Church Development (Resolution 8763). This new emphasis, the "Decade of Discipling," sets a priority for establishing 200 new churches nation-wide during the 1990s.⁴ According to the denomination-wide success of the program of the 1980s this goal appears to be approachable. However, in light of the limited success of the CAN program on the West Coast, there is concern for the implementation of this priority in the Pacific Slope regions.

The concern for the "Decade of Discipling" priority in regards to the West Coast regions can be summed up by two questions: (1) Do Disciples have a sense of importance that is sufficient enough to compell them to start a significant number of new churches on the West Coast in the 1990s?; and (2) Has there been sufficient adaptation of previous new congregational establishment models (namely those of the 1950s and 60s) to assure the success of starting new churches on the West Coast in the 1990s? (i.e., have

² Doris McCullough, "Remembering Where We've Been," a paper prepared for the CCNC-N Regional Fall Planning Day, Sacramento, Calif., 6 October 1989, p. 7.

³ This information was gathered through phone calls by the author to regional offices in the Northwest, Oregon, Northern California-Nevada, and the Pacific Southwest, August 1992.

⁴ Yearbook and Directory, 1988, of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), ed. Shirley L. Cox, (Indianapolis: Office of the General Minister and President, 1988), 323.

the cultural and demographic particularities of the West Coast in the 1990s been sufficiently identified in relation to the mission of the church when it comes to starting new congregations?)

Disciples have not had great success in starting new congregations on the West Coast for thirty years. The last successful program of new church starts was during the late 1950s. Many of those churches have grown to be vital congregations within their regions. Many of those churches are now supportive of the regional and general manifestations of the church through Basic Mission Finance contributions, and they provide leadership to regional and general church committees. Again, in the 1960s, the denomination launched a new church establishment program called the "Decade of Decision" in which it was hoped that a number of new churches would be established. Ultimately, the "Decade of Decision" was not successful in itself. Few congregations were established and even fewer have survived. Then, during the late 1960s and throughout the decade of the 1970s, denominational support for establishing new congregations was virtually lost.⁵ As can be seen above, the CAN program of the 1980s met with limited success on the West Coast as well. The concerns of starting new congregations without adequate cultural adaptation and in the absence of an appropriate theology of evangelism are valid ones.

The need for new Disciples of Christ congregations on the West Coast is tremendous. Church attendance figures for the West Coast are significantly lower than for the rest of the nation. A recent Sacramento Bee article noted that 66 percent of Sacramentans are not affiliated with any faith group.⁶ According

⁵ Jim Powell, telephone interview with author, 6 July 1990. Powell was the denominational executive responsible for the CAN programs with the Board of Church Extension for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

⁶ Bill Lindelof, "Church Not Central to Most in Capital", Sacramento Bee, 2 August 1992: B1.

to the learnings from the CAN program of the 1980s one of the major advantages of starting new congregations is their ability to reach the unchurched.⁷ Another feature which adds to the challenge of starting new Disciples congregations on the Pacific slope in the 1990s is that of potential for success. In the fall of 1991, the Board of Church Extension of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) contracted with Church Information and Development Services (CIDS) to select "key target areas" for new church establishment in the 1990s. Using demographic data and computer scanning techniques, CIDS compiled a list of the top 270 key target areas for the Disciples in the 1990s. Ninety of those top 270 key target areas are located on the Pacific Slope (Washington 11, Oregon 9, Northern California-Nevada 43, and Pacific Southwest 27)⁸. No other geographic region has such a large number of key target areas.

Will Disciples on the West Coast be able to meet the need of establishing a significant number of new congregations during the 1990s? If Disciples are to be able to meet this challenge they will have to reclaim their historic sense of the importance of starting new congregations based upon a clear theology of evangelism, they will need to develop and utilize a variety of low cost models of starting new congregations, and they will need to develop strong leadership that will champion the cause. There is much work to be done if Disciples are to be able to meet this great challenge!

⁷ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), New Congregation Establishment, 11.

⁸ Church Information and Development Services, Christian Church [Disciples of Christ] National Demographic Scanning Study, Costa Mesa, Calif., 12 July 1991.

Thesis

By reclaiming their historic commitment to starting new congregations, and by developing a clear and appropriate theology of evangelism for the Disciples of Christ, Disciples leadership will be capable of developing and utilizing a variety of effective, affordable models for starting new Disciples congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s. Such a theology must concern itself with the unique mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in regards to the culture of the Pacific Slope in the 1990s. That theology must also reflect the historic preference for Disciples of unity within diversity.

Definitions of Major Terms

Pacific Slope: In this paper the terms Pacific Slope and West Coast are used interchangeably. This is done to identify the regional area of the United States which includes Washington, Oregon, and California. According to sociologists this area has some distinct characteristics in regards to its social, political, and moral climate.⁹

Local, regional and general Church: The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) can be divided into three manifestations represented by the names as the local, regional and general church. In Disciples tradition each manifestation is both autonomous and interrelated. Local congregations are not necessarily bound by decisions made at the regional or general level of the church and vice versa. The local, regional and general level of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are linked by covenant. This relationship is known in Disciples circles as being cooperative.

⁹ James Patterson and Peter Kim, The Day America Told the Truth: What People Really Believe About Everything That Really Matters (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991).

CCNC-N: The regional manifestation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Northern California-Nevada with offices in Oakland, California.

Oregon: The regional manifestation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Oregon with offices in Portland, Oregon.

The Pacific Northwest: The regional manifestation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) which includes Northern Idaho, Washington, and Alaska, with offices in Seattle, Washington.

The Pacific Southwest: The regional manifestation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Southern California, Hawaii and Southern Nevada with offices in Pomona, California.

BCE: The Board of Church Extension (BCE) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) with headquarters in Indianapolis is one of the administrative units of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The BCE is a financial institution of the Disciples of Christ entrusted with the responsibility of financing loans for capital development, capital improvement, and denominational investment.

BMF: Basic Mission Finance (BMF) is a system of unified promotion for receiving and dispersing funds for regional and general programs within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Basic Mission Finance is incorporated within the Church Finance Council, which is one of the administrative units of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

DHM: The Division of Homeland Ministries (DHM) is the general administrative unit of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) which is entrusted with the responsibility for development and implementation of denominational programming and outreach within the United States and Canada. Included is the oversight of programs involving the departments of: Christian Education; Church in Society; Church Women, Men, and Youth;

Evangelism and Membership; and Ministry.

Decade of Decision: The denomination-wide new church development program of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was designed in the 1950s and carried out in the 1960s. (Approximately 22 churches were established in Northern California between the years of 1950-65. Many of these were Decade of Decision congregations.)

Decade of Discipling: The priority of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) adopted at the 1987 General Assembly meeting in Louisville, Kentucky (Resolution # 8763) which designated a priority for the establishment of 200 new congregations (denominationally) by the year 1998.

CAN and CAN II: The program of the Board of Church Extension of starting new congregations in the 1980s and 1990s. Church Advance Now (CAN) was the new church establishment program of the 1980s in which over 100 new congregations were started nationwide. CAN II is the new church establishment program of the 1990s for which the goal is the starting starting of 200 new congregations.

Mission: The word mission is sometimes used to discuss the outreach or service aspects of a congregation. In this paper I am using the term mission to mean the overall purpose, goals and direction of a local congregation. In this way, mission is the corporate understanding of a congregation for its existence and ministry. Here the word takes on the meaning of how a congregation understands itself and its calling from God to be the church in a particular time and place.

Method/Model: In this project the terms method and model are used synonymously to mean the way leadership goes about the task of starting new churches.

Work Previously Done in the Field

This study crosses several traditional fields of theological study, therefore a variety of sources have been consulted from history books, to theological and biblical materials, to newspaper and magazine articles. Each of these resources has made a unique contribution to this study.

In a study of denominational history, I have found that the Disciples once had an historic commitment to start new congregations. This commitment lasted up until the later part of the 1960s and was based on a theology of evangelism that was pervasive and uniquely Disciple in nature. Information on historic methods and practices of starting new congregations has been gathered from history books written by and for West Coast regions. These include a variety of histories ranging in date from the 1800s to the present.

Little work done in the field of establishing new congregations relates directly to the problem of starting new Disciples of Christ congregations on the West Coast. Therefore, this project examines a variety of works done in related fields. Included are works in the following areas:

Papers and histories prepared by West Coast regions, the Disciples Seminary Foundation, and local congregations are reviewed. These writings comprise a small (but important) corpus on the the unique ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) on the Pacific Slope. The Disciples Seminary Foundation (DSF) publishes a semi-annual journal entitled Impact, in which articles by West Coast Disciples scholars assess the scope of Disciples' ministry on the West Coast.

Three denominational handbooks on new church establishment are utilized. These handbooks have provided information on the current and historic methods of starting new congregations among the Disciples. Published in the late 1950s, Fred W. Michel's handbook on How To Start a New Church

gives insight on the guidelines for new church development during the 1950s.¹⁰ In the 1960s Lonnie Hass (Director of New Church Establishment for the Department of Church Development of the United Christian Missionary Society) wrote Build My Church. This became the denominational handbook for the Decade of Decision.¹¹ The New Congregation Establishment handbook, provides the denominational goals and guidelines for establishing new congregations during the CAN program of the 1980s.¹² Most (if not all) of these goals will apply to the work of the 1990s as well.

A small group of scholars have explored the particularities of starting new congregations in light of the cultural setting of the 1980s. Notable among them are the works collected and written by Ezra Earl Jones.¹³ Many of the findings of these scholars are useful to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) because they are not tied to a specific denomination. Jones' work represents input from a variety of denominations including the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In addition, Donald Metz has undertaken a study of new congregations in California,¹⁴ and C. Earl Gibbs has written a paper on The Impact of New Church Establishment on Membership Increase in West Coast Disciples Regions.¹⁵ Both are reviewed in regards to the particularities of this

¹⁰ Fred W. Michel, How To Start a New Church (Indianapolis: Dept. of Church Development and Evangelism, United Christian Missionary Society, [1956]).

¹¹ Lonnie Hass, Build My Church: A Manual For New Church Establishment (Indianapolis: Dept. of Church Development, United Christian Missionary Society, n.d.).

¹² Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), New Congregation Establishment.

¹³ See Ezra Earl Jones, ed., New Church Development in the Eighties: Some Perspectives from the Seventies (Cincinnati: National Division, Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1976); and Ezra Earl Jones, Strategies for New Churches (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

¹⁴ Donald Metz, New Congregations (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967).

¹⁵ C. Earl Gibbs, The Impact of New Church Establishment on Membership Increase in West

project.

Any study of growing churches (new or established) must take seriously work from the church growth movement of Donald McGavran, Win Arn, and others. Lyle Schaller has added a significant amount of writings to the field of the growth of congregations as well. His writings are also important. In addition, much has been written in recent years about the ways in which congregations attract and assimilate new members. In the 1980s, mainline denominations experienced a decline in membership while many of the conservative and evangelical churches experienced growth in membership. Other researchers have focused their research on this topic as well. Scholars have attributed the growth of the conservative and evangelical churches to a complex mixture of societal and demographic factors, both theological and sociological in nature.¹⁶ A general overview of this material is presented here with the desire for finding a model of church growth and development which is effective and yet appropriate to the denominational and theological heritage of the Disciples of Christ.

Recently other books and articles have appeared in two other areas which have proven helpful for this project: congregational development and leadership in the twenty-first century. A growing corpus of writings has emerged in the inter-disciplinary arena of congregational development. Much of this work is being done by Christian educators and church management scholars, and is a cutting edge of research. Articles from the Alban Institute, the Search Institute, George Barna, and others who are currently working in the field of

Coast Disciples Regions. Oikodomé Reports, 1. Disciples Seminary Foundation, Claremont, Calif., 1983.

¹⁶ Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, eds., Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978 (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979).

developing congregations, have been consulted whenever possible.

Along similar lines is a body of research being written for church leadership of the twenty-first century. Denominational handbooks on congregational empowerment, and organizing for mission and ministry have been explored and incorporated into the project.¹⁷ Schaller and Kennon Callahan have undertaken the task of making predictions about the nature of the church and its future.¹⁸ Learnings from these works are included throughout the project. An additional list of resources can be found at the end of each chapter.

Another related subject is the topic of the political, sociological and ethical make up of the U.S. in the 1990s. Books such as Megatrends 2000 and The Day America Told the Truth have helped to define the socio-political-moral climate of the the United States in this last decade of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Tex Sample and Lyle Schaller have done research exploring how the church and its mission can relate to this cultural climate.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

This project does not concern itself with congregations in denominations other than Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), or regions other than those on the Pacific Slope. The hope, however, is that an understanding of starting new congregations in other denominations and regions will also be garnered from

¹⁷ See William H. Edwards, ed, Igniting The Flames of Commitment and Witness: A Handbook on Congregational Empowerment (Indianapolis: Division of Homeland Ministries, Christian Church [Disciples of Christ], 1990); and W. Chris Hobgood, Organizing for Mission and Ministry: Congregational Program Planning Manual (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1991).

¹⁸ Kennon L. Callahan, Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990; and Lyle Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991).

¹⁹ John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990's (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1990); and Patterson and Kim.

the information here.

This project includes material on a variety of social factors which are expected to occur in the decade of the 1990s. Because many of these factors are forecasts of trends, this study focuses primarily on factors which appear most likely to occur and those which most directly affect congregational life on the Pacific Slope. Predicting the future is neither safe nor foolproof. Accurately assessing the present is limited by personal bias and lack of perspective. If the church is going to establish successful new congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s, however, assessment of the present and predictions of the future are necessary, limited though they may be.

This project takes into account a variety of elements in starting new churches such as: leadership (both pastoral and lay), relationship to the regional church, theological and philosophical expectations, common vision, intentionality, goals, and other significant factors. Because each situation has its own uniqueness and opportunities, it is impossible to examine every possible factor involved in starting a new congregation. For this reason, at the end of each chapter a list of questions for further reflection has been included. Groups using this project as a resource for starting a new congregation will want to enter into dialogue with the questions provided. Groups hoping to start new congregations will also want to raise questions of their own in regards to the particularities of their situation.

Procedure for Integration

This project crosses the fields of church history, theology, and church management. Involved in a tangential way is the field of sociology out of a desire to examine socio-cultural trends, past and future, which affect the church. Ideas and information from these fields are collected in a manner designed to

be helpful for leaders involved in starting new churches on the West Coast in the 1990s. This project is provided in a format that will easily transfer to loose leaf notebook and is intended to be used as the basis for regionally sponsored workshops on the topic of starting new congregations in the 1990s. Included at the end of each chapter is a list of questions for further discussion and a list of subsequent resources for further study.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2 is an historical study and analysis of patterns and methods of starting new congregations of the Disciples of Christ on the Pacific Slope. In that chapter, several factors have been determined which have historically been helpful for new church establishment among the Disciples of Christ. These factors and patterns can be translated for Disciples' needs in the 1990s and include: a need to develop an appropriate theology of evangelism for one's own time, the need to provide an analysis of the culture in order to translate the Gospel to the culture, the utilization of a variety of models of starting new congregations, and the important role of leadership in starting new congregations. Chapter 2 is an exploration and outline of the needs addressed by the rest of this project.

The research from Chapter 2 shows a strong connection between evangelism and the success of starting new Disciples churches. At one time Disciples had a pervasive theology of evangelism which included (almost as second nature) the desire to start new congregations. This Disciples theology of evangelism was one of the factors that facilitated growth of the Disciples, particularly on the West Coast. Chapter 3 begins the process of developing an appropriate theology of evangelism for the 1990s.

Chapter 4 is a study of some of the sociological, political, economic and

ethical factors which influence church growth and development on the West Coast. That chapter explores the unique way in which the mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) can help translate the Disciple understanding of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the culture of the Pacific Slope in the 1990s.

It is clear that no single model for starting new congregations will be sufficient to the task of starting a large number of new congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s. Each situation provides unique opportunities and challenges, and therefore a variety of models are needed. Chapter 5 explores and analyzes the predominant models for starting new churches by the Disciples of Christ since the 1940s (including the successful 1950s model, the models of the 60s, and the CAN and CAN II which have/had limited success). Models from a variety of successful congregations, both mainline and evangelical in theological makeup, are also explored. Included in this chapter are models such as mothering, adoption, church planting, and other low cost options.

Experts involved in church growth and new congregational development believe that leadership (lay and clergy) is one of the most, if not the single most crucial factor in starting new congregations. Chapter 6 deals with the development of leadership and concludes with an outline for a conference on starting new churches among the Disciples of Christ. Chapter 6 draws conclusions from this study as the basis for that workshop/conference. A prototype conference was presented to the Northern California region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in January of 1992, and is also available to other regions on the Pacific Slope.

The need for starting new Disciples of Christ congregations on the West Coast is tremendous. Growth patterns, the general church priority,

demographic data and a desire to reach the unchurched dictate that need. In order to develop leaders and models to handle this need it is helpful to understand which models and styles of leadership have been helpful in the past. In this regard we turn now to an historical study of new congregational development on the West Coast.

For Further Discussion

1. What is your primary motivation as you begin to think about and discuss the possibility for starting new congregations? (In other words, why are you interested in this type of ministry?)
2. What opportunities for starting new congregations present themselves in your situation? What obstacles (real or perceived) would prevent you from completing that task?
3. The process of starting a new church is both a spiritual and a managerial task. What efforts will you undertake to prepare yourself for the spiritual aspects of this work? For the managerial aspects?

Resources

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Board of Church Extension and Division of Homeland Ministries. New Congregation Establishment, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Indianapolis: Board of Church Extension, 1988.

---. We Can!: The Evolution of New Church Establishment, 1989. Indianapolis, 1989, video.

Edwards, William H., ed. Igniting the Flames of Commitment and Witness: A Handbook on Congregational Empowerment. Indianapolis: Division of Homeland Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 1990.

Schaller, Lyle E. 44 Questions for Church Planters. Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.

Chapter 2

Historic Methods of Starting New Congregations Among the Disciples of Christ

History has a way of repeating itself. If we are to learn from history we must study it! Before we can propose a model (or models) for starting new churches among Disciples of Christ on the Pacific Slope in the 1990s we must look at the history of new church development of Disciples on the West Coast. In so doing we will be able to determine patterns and factors of past successes and/or failures. The purpose of this chapter is to study and analyze historic patterns and methods of starting new congregations among the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

There is a clear relationship between certain developments in U.S. history and the methods and practices of starting new congregations among the Disciples. In this chapter historical data has been gathered and analyzed according to patterns of growth and change in the United States. That material has also been analyzed in regards to internal factors within the Disciples of Christ. During specific periods of history Disciples were effective and intentional about starting new congregations. One intent here has been to show how West Coast cultural factors relate to these denominational patterns.

Denominational resources, regional history books, and information from local congregations have been utilized in this research to determine the methods and practices of starting new congregations among the Disciples of

Christ. Special focus is placed on the Pacific Slope regions of the United States -- Washington, Oregon and Northern and Southern California. In addition to these written resources, oral interviews have been conducted with denominational executives involved in the starting of new congregations.

The majority of these local, regional and general church histories have been written from the perspective of the predominant (i.e., white, middle-class) culture. Disciples have most often started new congregations among this group and this continues to be the majority group for the denomination. Admittedly, Disciples have done inadequate work in starting churches among non-whites.¹ One denominational goal for the 1990s is to reverse that trend.

The completion of this research has been confounded because of a lack of uniformity in statistical information from one region to another. An attempt was made to compile statistical information which would show historic areas of growth among the Disciples of Christ. However, due to the methods of record keeping (or lack thereof), compilation of data of that nature would have been misleading and inaccurate. According to Frank Helme in the Office of Research for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), records of this nature have been kept on a "region-by-region basis."² There has been no standard format for reporting and recording this information. Thus, attempts at compiling statistical information on a denominational basis were met with limited success.³ For this

¹ Harold Watkins, President, Board of Church Extension, telephone interview with author, 27 Sept. 1991.

² Frank Helme, Executive Director, Office of Research, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), telephone interview, 19 Sept. 1991.

³ While this factor presents a difficulty from a research standpoint, it helps to define a theological reality for the Disciples of Christ. Disciples have traditionally and historically upheld a theological tension between "independence" and "cooperation." The ways in which this theological basis has affected the starting of new congregations are dealt with in this project under the section on theology.

reason I have chosen to utilize the general patterns of denominational growth as outlined in McAllister and Tucker's book, Journey In Faith. In addition, a numerical compilation of the Pacific Slope regions for each decade, beginning with the earliest records available, is included in Appendices A and B. These figures, while not accurate for statistical purposes, do allow us to note patterns of growth or decline of the West Coast regions during specific historic periods.

The method and standards of record keeping have also made it impossible to determine the success (or "viability") of congregations started by the Disciples according to the methods used for new church starts.⁴ Several factors determine a congregation's success (i.e., its ability to support a full time minister, its inclusion in the yearbook, a certain number of members, etc.). Each region, in fact each congregation, has a different opinion on what factors determine viability. Disciples have traditionally been committed to theological diversity and congregational autonomy, thus there has been no set standard for determining congregational viability. There has been no way of making a correlation between the number of churches begun and the number of churches that became viable. Thus, there is no way of determining which methods were successful. In the early years congregations may have included a handful of persons who met together in a home for worship and communion. If these small bands lasted long enough to form a fellowship they might have made it into the yearbook. If they did not last long there is probably no written record of their existence. Prior to the 1950s there was no denomination-wide program for starting new congregations. Lack of uniformity has made this way of studying

⁴ "Viability" is the word used by the Board of Church Extension, Church Advance Now (CAN) program to explain that a congregation has "succeeded" in being formed. Deborah Thompson, CAN Director, interview with author, 17 September 1991.

methods of starting new congregations virtually useless. However, some patterns have become evident from the readings and oral interviews. These patterns are outlined in a separate section of this chapter.

A third section of this chapter deals with theologies which have been prevalent for Disciples when starting new congregations. The theological viewpoint of a congregation can add to its immediate success or failure. Theology can also affect the way in which the new church grows, governs itself and relates to other. Disciples have utilized a variety of theologies in starting new congregations.

The conclusion of this chapter is an analysis of the material found within. The intent of that analysis is to provide the basis for the rest of this project.

Historic Patterns of Starting New Congregations

How have Disciples gone about starting new churches historically? What patterns of growth can be determined among the Disciples of Christ? What models have Disciples utilized to start new congregations? Which of these models have been most effective on the Pacific Slope?

According to Harold Watkins (President of the Board of Church Extension of Disciples of Christ), "each era started new churches in the nature of what was happening in the larger culture of the time period."⁵ In the West this pattern appears to hold true. The men and women who started churches in Washington, Oregon, Nevada and California were influenced by the spirit of the pioneers, the economic busts of the Great Depression and World War, and the boom of the post war era. Disciples in the West started new churches in patterns that were consistent with the patterns of growth in the West. Below are

⁵ Watkins, interview.

patterns that were consistent with the patterns of growth in the West. Below are listed the basic historic time periods of church development in the West.

1840s - Late 1880s

The Disciples of Christ have their beginnings on the American frontier of the early 1800s. Barton Stone, and Thomas and Alexander Campbell joined forces with a handshake in 1832 and the Restoration Movement was underway. Marked by simplicity, unity and freedom the movement was dedicated to the plea of uniting Christians and restoring the Christian church of the New Testament. Christians or Disciples (the names were interchangeable from the beginning) believed in the Bible as the basis of the Christian faith and have traditionally been anti-sectarian. Baptizing by immersion and celebrating communion every week the Disciples preached the gospel of “unity within diversity.” These beliefs were popular on the frontier and the Restoration Movement spread rapidly across the countryside.

Nationally the 1830s-1860s was “a time of consolidation and growth for the Disciples.”⁶ During this time the Disciples began forming themselves into state and national Missionary Societies. The Campbell-Stone movement began to catch fire on the frontiers and quickly expanded across the plains of Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, and points West. Following the Civil War, Westward expansion and growth was the order of the day for the United States of America. According to McAllister and Tucker, “Disciples grew at twice the rate of the nation’s population in the post-Civil War era.”⁷ During this period the Disciples were growing in the far West as well.

⁶ Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, Journey In Faith (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1975), 159.

⁷ McAllister and Tucker, 235.

The first wagon train came to Oregon in 1843 and in 1845 the first Christian Church was established “on the banks of the Yamhill River.”⁸ The first meeting of Disciples in California was in 1849 at Gold Run (in the “Mother Lode”). From the beginning, folks who had ties to the Restoration Movement sought out others with similar historic ties. They also received converts from non-Disciples as they met weekly for preaching and communion.

These men and women had a pioneer spirit. They were ingenious in their desire to start new congregations. Often they farmed, mined or held other jobs during the week and preached to a small group on Sundays. They were enlightened with an evangelistic zeal and spurred by “The Plea.”⁹

These pioneer preachers were creative in their methods of gathering a church together. They met in homes, tents, or anywhere they could find. Of one “lively pioneer preacher” C. F. Swander writes:

Martin Petterson came by wagon train to Sacramento in 1864 and Oregon a year later. His zeal for the cause was evidenced by the fact that in crossing the plains he held services regularly every Lord’s Day with the emigrant train. He called it the ‘First Church on Wheels.’ There were 30 members of the Christian Church in that train. While preaching a sermon on June 30, 1889, he was stricken down and died the next day. He devoted his entire life to the church and steadfastly refused ever to take a penny for his labors.¹⁰

The first Disciples churches in the West were small in number in the beginning. Stockton began in 1851 with 21 charter members.¹¹ Sacramento First was chartered in 1855 with 29 members.¹² Selma was founded in

⁸ Clarence F. Swander, Making Disciples in Oregon ([St. Louis]: n.p., 1928), 25.

⁹ McAllister and Tucker, 159.

¹⁰ Swander, Making Disciples in Oregon, 35.

¹¹ “A History of the First Christian Church,” Stockton, Calif., n.d., p. 2.

¹² Charles L. Greene, photocopy of manuscript, 1929, p. 2.

January of 1885 with 18 members.¹³

Denominationally this was a time of organization of state and national conventions and missionary societies. As soon as Disciples in the West got a few churches established they too felt the need to meet together. However, because of their late start, Disciples in the West did not begin meeting in missionary societies until some 30 years after the first national convention.¹⁴

By 1882 there were 27 Disciples congregations in Northern California. In 1890 they began holding state wide evangelistic meetings in a Tabernacle in Santa Cruz which was built specifically for this purpose.¹⁵ Such evangelistic meetings were popular among Disciples in these early years. Early disciples had a clear theology of evangelism which was the driving force behind their meetings.¹⁶

From the time the first wagon train and miners came to the West there has been a Disciples presence. These men and women were truly pioneers in every aspect of life, including church life. Meeting in small groups wherever they could, they were encouraged by men with little theological training and lots of spirit. Dedicated to the Campbell-Stone movement, these pioneer Disciples gathered for worship, study and communion every Lord's Day. Such was the beginning of the Disciples of Christ on the Pacific Slope.

¹³ George Wells, History of Selma Christian Church (Selma, Calif.: n. p., 1935), 1.

¹⁴ McAllister and Tucker, 175.

¹⁵ McCullough, 3.

¹⁶ Lester G. McAllister, letter to the author, 31 January 1992.

1890s - 1919

As the United States approached the twentieth century, growth and change became the dominant themes. Industrialization and urbanization affected the landscape of American society. The turn of the century, and the decades surrounding it, meant change for the Restoration Movement as well.

Denominational shifts of the early 1900s influenced church growth and the establishment of new churches. Led by the women, Disciples began to embrace a zeal for missions that was popular among other Protestant denominations. A new generation of leaders and a split with the Churches of Christ brought a resurgence in evangelism among Disciples. During this time period, many regions (including those in the West) employed traveling evangelists who helped start new congregations. In the early twentieth century some of the young Disciples ministers and lay persons appropriated the new theology of the “social gospel.” This affected the way churches understood their mission in the world. In the later teens the growth of new churches slowed with the economy and the U.S. involvement in World War I. All of these factors influenced the pattern of starting new congregations on the West Coast.

Of this era McAllister and Tucker write: “The period from the 1880s to World War I saw the rise of several important leaders. A new generation of Disciples, lay and clergy, had arrived on the scene filled with a love for the gospel as understood by the Stone-Campbell movement and dedicated to its furtherance.”¹⁷ Disciples in the West were struggling to move beyond their pioneer roots and by the 1910s were becoming part of the denominational establishment. Among the names of this “new generation” listed by McAllister and Tucker are some prominent West Coast preachers.

¹⁷ McAllister and Tucker, 307.

This era was spurred by a missionary spirit. Disciples in general were slow to pick up the missionary zeal of other Protestant denominations, but by the end of the nineteenth century, evangelistic and missionary societies were becoming more and more popular. The women led the way in starting and supporting these missionary societies through their leadership of time and money.¹⁸ Women were strong leaders on the West Coast as well.

These missionary societies were a way of providing unity among an ever increasing number of churches of the movement. Disciples would meet in state conventions for worship and to conduct the business of the missionary society. However, not all Disciples agreed with this practice and a split between the Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ became eminent.

McAllister and Tucker describe this period in Disciples history as one of division over issues such as the use of instrumental music in worship, the paid pastorate and missionary societies.¹⁹ Churches in the West, however, were young and struggling, feeling the need to gather together and support each other in ministry. They were more concerned with the practical matters that consumed their pioneer lives; thus these controversies appear to have missed the West Coast churches. There are some records, however, which indicate that the controversies did exist in the West.²⁰

The first missionary society in Oregon was organized in 1888.²¹ By the mid-

¹⁸ McAllister and Tucker, 259.

¹⁹ McAllister and Tucker, 251.

²⁰ Emil Bunjes, Trusting for Life -- 1876-1976: A History Written for the 100th Anniversary of the First Christian Church (Oakland, Calif.: First Christian Church, 1976), p.1.

²¹ Swander, Making Disciples in Oregon, 59.

1880s, Southern California also had a missionary society.²² The purpose of these missionary societies was twofold: to start new congregations and to help struggling existing ones. In the West these missionary societies were at first concerned with “home missions.”

In Oregon the women were the first to support local missions through mission points. In the 1890s, Oregon Disciples still considered themselves to be part of the mission field. For them the era of the “pioneer” was not yet over.²³ The first “mission point” for Oregon women was the First Christian Church of Portland. The young church had been struggling for nine years until, in 1888, through the urging of the Oregon State Board of Women, the First Christian Church of Portland became a mission point and received a missionary pastor. This missionary ministry was effective, for within thirty years the Portland congregation membership had jumped to “over 1200 souls.”²⁴ The Women’s Board also supported the congregations of “Rodney Ave. (Portland), Corvallis, and Pendleton.”²⁵

One of the biggest tasks of the women’s Board was the establishment of a Chinese Mission in Portland in 1891. This mission provided an important ministry and lasted into the 1920s. Similar missions were started in San Francisco and Los Angeles.²⁶

²² Clifford A. Cole, The Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) of Southern California: A History (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1959), 98.

²³ Swander, Making Disciples in Oregon, 175.

²⁴ Swander, Making Disciples in Oregon, 162.

²⁵ Swander, Making Disciples in Oregon, 162.

²⁶ McAllister and Tucker, 323.

By the beginning of the 1900s the nationwide theme for Disciples had almost completely shifted to world missions. The split with the Churches of Christ was finalized by 1906. In 1909 (on the Centennial of the “Declaration and Address”) plans were made to hold a Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This proved to be a watershed Convention for the Disciples of Christ. All agencies of the brotherhood were encouraged to set long-range goals and did. Members of congregations were urged to set goals for themselves for Bible study, evangelism, etc. The theme for the Convention (“The union of all believers, on a basis of Holy Scripture, to the end that the world may be evangelized”) reflected both the Disciples theology of unity within diversity and the importance of evangelism among Disciples.²⁷

One of the high points of the convention was the christening of the S. S. Oregon for mission work on the Congo river in Africa. The state of Oregon raised \$10,000 (of the needed \$15,000) for that project. The gift was accepted by the Foreign Christian Missionary Society and the ship was “dedicated at the Centennial Convention.”²⁸

In summary of this event McAllister and Tucker write: “The Centennial Convention at Pittsburgh in 1909 was a ‘coming of age’ of the Disciples. . . . Their morale had never been higher as they achieved many of their goals. . . . Disciples were well launched into the twentieth century.”²⁹ With their support of the Steamship Oregon, West Coast Disciples were at the forefront of that event.

The Disciples movement had its strength in the rural areas of the Midwest.

²⁷ McAllister and Tucker, 311.

²⁸ Swander, Making Disciples in Oregon, 185.

²⁹ McAllister and Tucker, 311.

When they came to the Pacific Slope, however, Disciples established churches in urban areas. The early 1900s of rapid growth in the cities of the West, especially in southern California. From 1900 to 1910 Southern California Disciples began 31 churches which had in some way survived at least into the 1950s.³⁰

At the beginning of the twentieth century a new theology (the social gospel) became popular among American protestants. This social gospel theology was formulated in the inner city slums of New York and Chicago, as the nation migrated to the city for jobs in the factories. This new theology caught on among the Disciples. McAllister and Tucker write:

A younger generation of preachers and leaders, educated in sociological concerns, freely accepted the social gospel and its implications for the program of the church. In earlier days Disciples conventions, state and national, had been mainly concerned with missionary and organizational matters, but by the early twentieth century Disciples leaders and preachers began to express interest in social issues with prohibition becoming a major interest.³¹

As the theology of the Social Gospel caught on, methods of starting new congregations were effected. The church soon became a vehicle of social change. "Institutional Churches" and "Social Settlement Houses" (as per Jane Addams' Chicago "Hull House") were popular forms of the church in society.³² Although records of West Coast churches do not specifically discuss using these forms of church as a model, the urban nature of West Coast congregations suggests that Disciples had them in mind when they started churches in the Western cities of the early 1900s. The social gospel was also

³⁰ Cole, 156.

³¹ McAllister and Tucker, 293.

³² McAllister and Tucker, 288.

associated with the labor movement and the organization of unions. In the late 1890s, "Kelly's Army" organized in Oakland, California, and marched across the country to make demands on Washington. The young First Christian Church of Oakland helped with the organization of this march.³³

One of the primary purposes of the state missionary society was to establish new churches. The head of the state society (now the Regional Minister) was often called the State Evangelist. Many of these state societies also employed traveling evangelists. These traveling evangelists would assist existing congregations needing help, but for the most part they held protracted meetings from which many new congregations were formed.³⁴ Denominationally the early 1900s saw a renewed interest in evangelism due in part to the loss of members in the Church of Christ split.³⁵ Evangelism continued to be a dominant theme, even with the rise of the influence of the Social Gospel.

Denominationally the "Church Extension Fund" (precursor to the Board of Church Extension) was started in 1883. By 1900 the Church Extension Fund had helped establish homes for 600 congregations ³⁶

Nationally the period from 1890 to the beginning of World War I was a time of growth. New leaders, modern theologies, a missionary zeal and a renewed interest in evangelism fueled the Disciples fire well into the twentieth century. On the Pacific Slope these decades were also a time of rapid growth. Newly organized state missionary societies encouraged mission and evangelism, both

³³ McAllister and Tucker, 291.

³⁴ See Cole, 98; and Swander, Making Disciples in Oregon, 79.

³⁵ McAllister and Tucker, 326.

³⁶ McAllister and Tucker, 271.

of which contributed to the establishment of congregations in the West. Disciples on the West Coast were coming of age. An economic depression and World War (between 1910 and 1920) slowed progress only somewhat.

1920s

Across the United States this was a time of great financial growth and prosperity (the “Roaring Twenties”). Denominationally this was also a roaring time of growth. Traveling evangelists brought in new converts faster than the churches could incorporate them. Of this time period Lani Olson writing for the Board of Church Extension reports, “It was discovered that our evangelists, like an advance guard too far in front of its army -- were taking in more territory than the forces in the rear could occupy and hold. In other words, our programs of evangelism were outrunning our programs of conservation.”³⁷

McAllister and Tucker characterize this time period as an era in which expansion may have been too fast. They write, “the prosperous 1920s produced a period of over expansion for the church as well as for business. Mission boards, church colleges, and other agencies of the church were over staffed and overbuilt. Congregations all over the country entered into a period of building costly structures, often with borrowed money. A day of economic reckoning was not far distant.”³⁸

On the West Coast, Disciples were busy taking advantage of the “boom.” In Oregon, Washington, and California state evangelists traveled the state starting new churches. For Southern California the 1920s were characterized by “rapid

³⁷ Lani J. Olson, Building A Witness: 100 Years of Church Extension (Indianapolis: Board of Church Extension, Christian Church [Disciples of Christ], 1983), 34.

³⁸ McAllister and Tucker, 359.

growth and expansion. . . and financial prosperity.”³⁹ In that ten year time period 33 churches were added to the rolls of the Southern California State Society. Northern California started an evangelism campaign in 1919 entitled “Each One Win One.” This campaign is listed by Doris McCullough as rather successful, even though the yearbook of 1930 lists seven fewer churches in Northern California than in 1920.⁴⁰

The 1920s was a time of growth and expansion for the entire denomination. However, growth may have been too fast given the depression that was to follow.

1930s - 1940s

In 1929 the Stock Market crashed and with it the hopes of a roaring nation. That crash propelled the U.S. into the Great Depression which lasted over a decade. Times were hard, work was difficult to find, and money was short for most Americans. The Great Depression had an impact on every aspect of American life, including church life.

For the Disciples, as for most denominations, this was a time of slower growth. Building projects had to be put on hold or abandoned all together. Times were tough. Fortunately, tough times tend to inspire people to act courageously and the Disciples of Christ continued to be led by the tough spirit of mission, evangelism and growth of the previous eras. The Depression inspired them to be creative and make sacrifices in order to achieve their goals. To help themselves become courageous in these tough times, Disciples looked to their past. Lani Olson tells the following story of this era:

³⁹ Cole, 157.

⁴⁰ McCullough, 4.

During these depressing years, when one of every five banks and one of every 10 U.S. businesses failed, BCE found strength in the tales of courage from its past. At its 1928 '50th Anniversary' . . . BCE celebrated with remembrance of former days. A pageant called 'Sanctuary' was presented to the 1938 International Convention. It detailed some of the sacrifices that nineteenth century Disciples had made in order to have a 'church house': a woman who tried to give her wedding ring to aid homeless churches; a laboring man who sold his only cow for church extension; the Richards family who mortgaged their almost-new home and gave the money to their church. Key figures of faith were the evangelist and his sickly wife who felt called to save a Christian Church in Colorado from being put on the auction block.⁴¹

The 1930s were characterized by this same courageous spirit. Olson continues:

The congregations which fully repaid their loans -- during 1937, there were only 26 of them -- had done so at some sacrifice. In the meantime, BCE was loaning every available penny despite the fears of defaults. It made 29 loans in 1937, 46 in 1938, and 47 in 1939. Even the antagonistic [periodical *The Christian*] *Standard* had to grudgingly admit BCE was doing 'yeoman service.' These were historical parallels of courage.⁴²

In order to maintain the evangelistic zeal which had carried them through the first part of the twentieth century, Disciples became creative in their approach to starting new congregations. As they had in the past, Disciples found strength in cooperative ventures. In his 1946 supplement to Making Disciples in Oregon, C. F. Swander records the founding of the "Ninety and Nine Men's Brotherhood of Oregon" in 1931.⁴³ Borrowing the idea from the Washington State Missionary Society, Disciples men in Oregon gathered together for fulfillment of three primary objectives: "(1) To mobilize the man power of the church; (2) To

⁴¹ Olson, 46.

⁴² Olson, 46.

⁴³ Swander, Supplement to Making Disciples in Oregon (St. Louis: n.p., 1946), 35.

train men in Christian life and service; and (3) To evangelize lost souls.”⁴⁴ In the 1930s the Ninety and Nine provided financial support to the State Evangelist, raised funds to reroof the Steamship Oregon, and helped with projects at the Old People’s Home at Beaverton. In the 1940s the Ninety and Nine continued their work as they undertook the employment of an evangelist and pledged funds for assisting to build homes for churches.⁴⁵

Thus, even in difficult times the Disciples in Oregon were able to continue the prosperous march which had brought them into the twentieth century. Hope for the future was bright. C. F. Swander writes:

It is worthy of note that Oregon Disciples have increased from 20,000 in 1928 to 30,000 in 1946. That is a 50% gain in 18 years. It is not at all improbable that they will number 50,000 in the next 20 years.⁴⁶

West Coast Disciples were able to maintain a slowed pace of growth during the financially tight years of the Great Depression, but with the United State's entry into World War II in December of 1941 came a different type of economic concern. The economy began to pick up, due in part to factory production of war materials, but times were still financially difficult. Available resources were focused on the war . The military had first demand on raw materials and material goods. Resources were conserved as the nation got behind the war effort. One example of this is the note by Swander in his Supplement that the year 1945 there was “no convention on account of war time ban on conventions by the ODT.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Swander, Supplement, 35.

⁴⁵ Swander, Supplement, 35.

⁴⁶ Swander, Supplement, 2.

⁴⁷ Swander, Supplement, 44.

None-the-less the economy had pulled itself out of a depression. State societies continued to employ state evangelists who continued to work in the area of starting new congregations. Several new churches were started during this period, but at a slower rate than during earlier boom years. Southern California started twenty new congregations in the 1940s.⁴⁸ Between 1944 and 1949 northern California added eleven churches to its report at the state Convention.⁴⁹ C. F. Swander reports of ten new congregations in Oregon between the years of 1940 and 1945. These congregations were started in a variety of ways, some with state society support and some without. One effective method of the 1940s for Oregon was the utilization of the "Ninety and Nine evangelist."⁵⁰

As the U.S. completed its involvement with the war, the economy and culture began a new era of unprecedented growth.

1950s

The decade from 1950 to 1960 was a time of enormous growth. Soldiers returned from World War II and began creating families. This was the era of the post-war "Baby Boom." The G.I. Bill made it possible for veterans to secure low interest home loans which created a new social entity -- the suburb. The population of America became the most mobile it had ever been as many members of the middle class moved to the suburbs. Among this shifting population was a renewed interest in religious ventures. As the Disciples

⁴⁸ Cole, 157.

⁴⁹ McCullough, 5.

⁵⁰ Swander, Supplement, 14-16.

population shifted to the suburbs, new churches sprang up to accommodate them.

In the 1950s the patterns of church development followed the patterns of changing populations. Across the board, denominations developed successful programs for starting new congregations among this mobile population. For the Disciples of Christ this was the first denomination-wide attempt at starting new churches. It was a cooperative venture involving a financial campaign, demographic studies, the development of a master plan for site purchase and building style, and much more. This was known as the "Decade of Decision."

Disciples on the West Coast participated in the Decade of Decision by starting new congregations as fast as they could. Cole writes, "The mid-century years between 1950 and 1958 witnessed the greatest era of church establishment and building. Most of the churches started in this period were the product of the efforts of the State Society, the majority of these new congregations being projects of Mid-Century Church Extension." Twenty eight churches were established in southern California between 1950 and 1958!

As an example of the way Disciples started new congregations in the 1950s Cole writes: Money raised in the Mid-Century Church Extension campaign was used

for the purchase of new sites and the erection of initial units of a chapel and an educational building for at least two or three churches per year in these brand new communities In the case of most of the thirteen churches there was no attempt at organizing a congregation until after the dedication of the completed buildings. No church school was started for a few Sundays subsequent to the opening of the church for worship services. . . . Obviously the State Society appoints the first minister of such churches and conducts the business and administration of the future congregation until such time as there is a valid organization.⁵¹

⁵¹ Cole, 159-60.

Northern California also participated in the Decade of Decision. Twelve new congregations are listed for northern California during the 1950s. Some of these are currently the strongest churches of that region.

During this time the work of the State Societies (soon to be Regions) was expanded. The world was becoming a more complex place. Technology and work patterns were shifting the needs of the American public. Work of the regions grew to reflect some of the complexities of church work in the latter part of the twentieth century. Starting new congregations took a back seat as many regions took on new responsibilities of congregational maintenance and increased program needs.

Mid-1960s - 1970s

The 1960s and 70s were decades of turmoil for “the establishment” (including churches) in the U.S. In the 100th Anniversary publication for the Board of Church Extension Lani Olson reports:

outside the church walls . . . social upheaval had begun. The Civil Rights Movement and U.S. entry into the Vietnam War were quickly followed by ‘black power’ and ‘flower power.’ As the long hot summer of 1967 broke, 164 urban riots swept the cities of the nation, culminating in the Detroit riots that left 43 dead. American social change had become violent in its passage.⁵²

Denominational effort was being put into restructure of the general organization of the church. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) had finally given up the tag of “brotherhood” for the title of “denomination.” The effort and energy put into restructure did much to gather the denomination together under a common vision. It also finalized a split which had been brewing since the 1920s. At the General Assembly in Kansas City (1968) a Provisional

⁵² Olson, 69.

Design for the Christian Church was unanimously adopted. Subsequently 2,300 congregations withdrew from the denomination.⁵³ It was a time of reorganization and turmoil.

During this time the church seemed to slip into a state of maintenance. Middle-class white people had been fleeing the cities for the suburbs since the end of World War II. The majority of members in Disciple congregations were white and their flight to the suburbs left inner city churches struggling to stay alive. During the 1960s and 70s Disciples lost the momentum for starting new congregations that had been so successful in the 1950s. Doris McCullough, regional Vice President of Northern California writes that in 1969 "the emphasis had moved from New Church to Mission - and on restoring confidence in the Regional Office."⁵⁴

The 1960s and 70s were a time of experimentation as well. Regions explored new styles of "church." In 1965 the House Church Movement started with four Metropolitan Christian Mission Churches in northern California: Berkeley, Fresno, Richmond and Hayward.⁵⁵ The purpose of these congregations was less evangelical and more support oriented, modeled somewhat after the style of Encounter Groups of the 60s. These small communities of faith were experimental in nature yet generally successful in achieving their purpose. "Coffee House" ministries were tried in Oakland and Hayward. By 1975 there were 75 churches reported in the yearbook for Northern California -- just six fewer than in 1960. However, some of these churches were experimental in nature. They were also quite small.

⁵³ McAllister and Tucker, 446.

⁵⁴ McCullough, 6.

⁵⁵ McCullough, 6.

Overall very few churches were started in the West from the mid-1960s through the 1970s. In Northern California there were no new churches started from 1965 to 1985. Many that were started on the West Coast during this time period (with the exception of the experimental churches) utilized the model of starting new congregations that was popular in the 1950s. However, the times were different, and the success of the 1950s was not repeated in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1970s, as mainline denominations declined, they began looking for other models of starting new congregations. On July 9, 1981, a "Think Tank" took place at the Menucha Conference Center in Corbett, Oregon. The purpose of this Think Tank was

to explore alternatives to the usual ways in which most denominations go about establishing new congregations. In addition to the 'usual way' (highly subsidized by national and regional denominational mission units, which send a full-time organizing pastor into the field) are there other ways which rely more on locally generated initiatives and funding and/or result in 'communities of faith' which have, fully, the marks of the Christian Church but which rely less on massive capital outlays for site and building.⁵⁶

Amidst the turmoil of the 1960s, starting new churches took on a different meaning. Regions, no longer fully committed to their original purpose of "starting new churches and helping existing ones" (see above), began experimenting with new models of church. Very few conventional churches were started in the West during this time. Many of the ones that were started tried to utilize the successful model of the 1950s. For the most part this did not work because the times were so drastically different.

⁵⁶ Joint Strategy and Action Committee (JASC), "Alternative Styles of New Church Development," [report], New York, 1981, p.1.

1980s

If the 1950s was the time of greatest growth in the history of the Disciples of Christ, the time period from 1965 to 1980 was the worst. In the later part of the 1970s, mainline Protestants (including Disciples) gained a renewed interest in evangelism. Mainline denominations had been experiencing a decline in membership since the middle of the 1960s. Something had to be done about these losses. Along with renewed interest in evangelism came a renewed effort in starting new congregations.

The Church Advance Now (CAN) program of the 1980s, a focused effort to start new congregations, was modeled mostly after the successful program of the 1950s. Nationwide the CAN program is considered to have been successful; however, on the West Coast that is not actually the case. In northern California, for example, three attempts were made at starting new churches in the 1980s (compared with 16 in the 1950s). Only one of these new congregations has continued to the present, and it is currently struggling financially. In earlier decades even "slow growth" periods were more active than the 1980s for Disciples. In the 1930s in southern California, for example, there was a slow period of church growth and "only about a dozen congregations came into existence during this period."⁵⁷ Even so it was more productive than from 1965 to the present.

Somewhere along the line, Disciples lost the drive to start new congregations which had characterized the success of the movement across the frontier and in the first part of the twentieth century. The current models of new church development are not adequate for the job. As we enter the 1990s, we continue to be faced with the need for finding a variety of ways to start new

⁵⁷ Cole, 157.

congregations.

Historic Methods of Starting New Congregations

The Disciples of Christ did not have a denominational strategy for starting new churches until the late 1940s and 1950s. However, some patterns of starting new congregations among the Disciples of Christ can be determined from the research.

Churches Started by Pioneers

In the early days of West Coast settlement some men with evangelistic zeal and a bit of ministerial training utilized pioneer spirit and ingenuity to start congregations. When these men came (or while they were coming) to the West, the desire to meet with other Disciples led them to gather together for prayer and worship whenever and wherever they could. Oftentimes they had other jobs during the week (farming, mining, etc.) and preached on Sundays. Sometimes these small congregations met in homes or other places until they could build facilities for themselves. In the West this period of being without a church home sometimes lasted for very long periods of time. The First Christian Church of Sacramento was homeless for 22 years!⁵⁸

Of this pioneer era the Rev. Marvin Martin, on the centennial of First Christian Church Stockton, wrote:

when nearly everyone in California was in a frenzied state of excitement about the free gold in the Sierra Hills, our Christian Church forefathers came to this State to bring men the riches of Christ. . . . Indeed they were a hardy lot! There were no organizations or churches back home to support these missionaries in the 'roaring mining camps' of the west. When the Lord's Day came many of these

⁵⁸ Greene, p. 3.

devoted laborers gathered friends into their homes to 'hold Communion and preaching.' Most often the preacher had something to say about 'our plea.' This is our heritage -- we are the sons of the pioneers.⁵⁹

Churches Started by Congregational Splits

Although not a preferred method of starting new congregations, church splits do occur, creating two congregations where there once was one. Church splits most often are the result of discord and strife within a congregation. In a church split, one group (generally the one without the vested power of the congregation) breaks away from the congregation to start a new church. Two examples of churches that started because of splits in northern California are Garfield Park in Santa Cruz, 1907, and Redding First Christian Church which started as a split from an Independent congregation in 1964.⁶⁰

Churches Started by Traveling Evangelists

Since the beginnings of the state missionary societies, regions have employed State Evangelists from time to time. Their job was to travel the region and hold protracted meetings. The presence of a state evangelist fits well with the original purposes of the state societies, which was to start new churches and support existing ones.

Many churches were started and encouraged by these state evangelists. As they traveled from community to community holding evangelistic meetings the church in that area flourished. If there was no Disciples church in a specific area, the state evangelist helped Disciples in that area start one. The method of

⁵⁹ Marvin E. Smith, "A Challenge Today," written for the Centennial of the First Christian Church of Stockton, Calif., 1951, n.p.

⁶⁰ See Eulah Pracht, "History of Garfield Park Christian Church," Santa Cruz, Calif., 1972, 1; and Bertine Rogers, "Redding First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)", typescript, n.d.

employing a state evangelist was effective for a long time among the Disciples. However, when the purpose of the regional church changed, these state evangelists were dropped from the staff in order to make room for other staff persons to fill the new roles needed by the regional office.

Churches Started by Other Congregations

Some churches were started as satellite congregations from another church. This method is known currently by many names including “mothering” and “church planting.” In this method, a viable local congregation (or group of local congregations) helped to start a new church in a nearby area where there was no Disciples presence. One example of this method was the Curtis Oaks Christian Church (later Freeport Blvd. Christian Church) of Sacramento, California. A letter to Thomas K. Devitt from Richard Rhodda in May of 1978 notes that Curtis Oaks “was organized with the help of leaders of the First Christian Church.”⁶¹ Many Disciples congregations were started in this way before there was a denomination-wide program of new church development

Churches Started with Denominational Sponsorship

In his history of the Southern California region, Clifford Cole holds up the importance of the state society in starting new congregations and notes how the influence of the state society helped the process. He writes, “Before state societies were formed there was a hit-and-miss, unstatesmanlike process of establishing new churches by which an uncalculating but enthusiastic person or persons would on their own initiative gather together a small group and

⁶¹ Richard Rhodda, trustee (of the Freeport Blvd. Christian Church, Sacramento, Calif.), letter to Thomas K. Devitt of the Disciples Seminary Foundation, Claremont, Calif., 1 May 1978.

announce the start of a new congregation.”⁶² After the State Society came into being there was a “more normal and common-sense procedure that would count the cost and do more clear-sighted planning.”⁶³

The 1950s Decade of Decision program of starting new churches was very successful. A unified approach was helpful in meeting the needs of a mobile nation. This was the first denomination-wide effort at starting new churches, and Disciples started many churches during this time.

The Church Advance Now (CAN) program of the 1980s was a similar approach to starting new congregations on a denomination-wide basis. The CAN program met with limited success for several reasons. The first reason appears to be the fact that the U.S. was a very different place in the 1980s than in the 1950s. The population was mobile, but in a different way. Second is the reality that Disciples turned from the business of starting new churches in the 1960s and 1970s. Starting new churches was no longer the central focus of regions. It was but one among many responsibilities. In spite of these factors, the CAN program was successful, with over 100 churches being started nationwide.

The Theology of Starting New Congregations

The theology of a denomination can help to define the methods and reasons for starting new congregations. This study reveals three predominant theologies at work among Disciples on the Pacific Slope.

⁶² Cole, 83.

⁶³ Cole, 83.

Evangelical Zeal

In the early part of the movement, Disciples had an evangelistic zeal. Stone's "Christians" came out of the great revival at Cane Ridge, and many Disciples have been committed to the type of religion aimed at saving souls from hellfire, even though Stone himself was not in favor of great emotionalism. McAllister and Tucker write that, "although Stone condemned the excesses of emotional religion, he saw much of positive value in revivalism."⁶⁴ Campbell was also concerned with "winning souls for Christ," but stressed almost wholeheartedly the use of intellect towards that pursuit.

The revivalist stream remained an undercurrent with Disciples, and there was a renewed denominational emphasis in the evangelism of winning souls from the turn of the century through the 1940s. This came about in part because of the loss in membership over the split with the Churches of Christ of 1906. McAllister and Tucker write, "To accelerate their growth, Disciples placed great emphasis on evangelism between 1900 and 1920"⁶⁵ In the early part of the twentieth century the American Christian Missionary Society had a Board of Evangelism, the National Evangelistic Association was begun, and later the United Christian Missionary Society would appoint a "superintendent of evangelism". Professional evangelists were employed by the state missionary societies to travel from place to place and hold evangelistic or protracted meetings.⁶⁶ Jesse Bader urged Disciples on with the slogan, "What our Lord made primary we have no right to make secondary."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ McAllister and Tucker, 149.

⁶⁵ McAllister and Tucker, 326.

⁶⁶ McAllister and Tucker, 326.

⁶⁷ McAllister and Tucker, 327.

Often these evangelistic meetings emphasized a rational approach to religion which is characteristic of Disciples. McAllister and Tucker write, "[A]lthough [professional evangelist Charles Reign] Scoville preached for the purpose of getting results, he did not turn his crusades into emotional binges. Said he: 'When a person at a revival meeting sits and wrings his hands and rolls his eyes and groans and sighs like a dying calf, that's not religion, that's foolishness.'"⁶⁸

Such an evangelistic theology stresses the need for people to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. As such it is only natural for Christians who hold such a theology to be concerned with starting new congregations to instruct, encourage and care for these new Christians. On the West Coast, as throughout the denomination, when evangelistic zeal was high, starting new congregations was inevitable.

The Social Gospel

A new theology of the Social Gospel was developed in the 1890s and early 1900s. Disciples were quick to accept the tenants of this new theology, and in the middle 1900s a definite theological shift is evident among Disciples from evangelistic to social concerns.

In Journey In Faith, McAllister and Tucker write about Disciples' involvement in the Social Gospel movement.

Disciples leaders and their followers came to believe that the purpose of the church was to work for the redemption of society as well as the saving of the individual. By the first decade of the twentieth century this theology had permeated Disciples thinking. Many of the young ministers of the early 1900s preached with these assumptions clearly in mind. The social gospel among Disciples was not, however, primarily a theological understanding but a practical response to

⁶⁸ McAllister and Tucker, 327.

human need.⁶⁹

They go on:

Few Disciples became creative or prophetic leaders of the social gospel movement. Their ministers and leaders mainly responded to the challenge of the issues. By the 1890s James H. Garrison was writing, 'It is high time the Church should come to the front as the champion of justice and equal rights among men.' Disciples preachers in general took the position that the Christian faith should be a balance between a desire to win the individual for Christ and a concern for correcting certain social ills, in that order.⁷⁰

The emphasis on the theology of the social gospel led leaders to focus on the need to reform the structures of society as a means of salvation. The role of the church shifted somewhat as this new theology took hold. The church was no longer merely a place in which to receive salvation. According to social gospel theology, the church is the agent that is to bring about reformation of society. This does not mean that the church is not to be evangelistic in nature. But it does mean that evangelism methods need to adjust to fit this new mission of the congregation as a change agent in society.

Unity and Diversity

One of the foundational and distinguishing theological features of the Disciples of Christ has been our commitment to unity within diversity. Alexander Campbell was fond of the saying, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials diversity, and in all things love."⁷¹ Another emphasis has been the rejection of man-made creeds," believing that faith in Jesus Christ and the centrality of the Bible, not adherence to a specific credal doctrine, is the only thing necessary for

⁶⁹ McAllister and Tucker, 286

⁷⁰ McAllister and Tucker, 287.

⁷¹ McAllister and Tucker, 21.

church membership.⁷² Realizing that Christians will naturally disagree intellectually, Disciples have encouraged education of the individual in order to develop a rational and personal faith. Disciples celebrate this unity around the Lord's Table.

Theologically and structurally, Disciples stress both independence and cooperation. Fully half of the book used in the 1950s and 1960s as a study guide for new Disciples was devoted to the topics of independence and cooperation.⁷³ Independence and cooperation are stressed among Disciples on an individual as well as a congregational basis.

The Disciples theology of unity and diversity (independence and cooperation) has affected the way Disciples have gone about starting new churches. At times both independence and cooperation have been helpful at starting new congregations. At times, both have hindered the process.

In the pioneer days, Disciples' independence led them to start new churches wherever and whenever it was possible. Cooperation led them to gather for support and encouragement as state missionary societies came into being. However, the lack of denominational organization meant that new church starts were left in the hands of individuals who either were or were not able to make a go of it on their own. In later years cooperative ventures provided for traveling evangelists whose duty it was to start new congregations and help build up existing ones. But traveling evangelists did not have the means to maintain a congregation of converts. That has always been more of an independent venture within local congregations. In more recent years unity meant both funding and a cohesive plan of starting new congregations. However, this

⁷² McAllister and Tucker, 26.

⁷³ Howard E. Short, Doctrine and Thought of the Disciples of Christ (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1951), 2.

venture within local congregations. In more recent years unity meant both funding and a cohesive plan of starting new congregations. However, this approach has little of the independent spirit that urged Disciples to grow in earlier years. The Disciples' theology of cooperation and independence has proven to be a two-edged sword, cutting both ways when it comes to starting new churches. It appears to be most helpful when the two opposing forces are held in tension with one another, providing for both cooperation as well as independence! Disciples' adherence to such a theology may also suggest the importance of a variety of approaches when it comes to starting new congregations.

Analysis of This Study

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe and analyze patterns of growth and methods of starting new congregations among West Coast Disciples of Christ. Emphasis has been placed upon the historic methods used by Disciples in general, and more specifically on the West Coast Disciples. It has been noted that new congregations were started in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons -- reasons both theological and practical. It has also been noted that Disciples have historically started new congregations in accordance with what was happening in the larger culture of the time period. The first Disciples churches on the West Coast were started by men and women with a pioneering spirit and an evangelistic zeal; few churches were started during the Depression and World War II; and many of the churches started during the 1960s were experimental in nature. The rationale, methods and patterns of starting new congregations have varied according to the energies and needs of the West Coast Disciples who started them.

Until the 1960s the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) believed that

starting new churches was a part of its gospel mandate. Disciples started new churches for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. Sometimes it had to do with the influence of a mobile population that was eager to have fellowship with like minded folks. Sometimes it had to do with opportunity. Sometimes it was a matter of an evangelistic (i.e., "soul saving") or missionary theology. It is clear that since the 1960s the Disciples of Christ (at least on the West Coast) have not felt the compelling mandate to start new congregations which motivated the denomination in the first 120 years of its existence. What has led to the loss of this historic mandate?

The answer to that question is complex. Several factors have led to the loss of this historic mandate. None of these factors appears to be enough reason in itself to cause the loss, but all of them together contribute to it. These factors include:

1. The role of regions. Regions have shifted away from one of their original purposes, which was starting new congregations. The role of the Regional office has expanded dramatically from the time of the State Evangelist. Demands from existing congregations have led the regions to shift their emphasis from the early 1900s.

2. Theological identity. Most of today's Disciples do not have the kind of evangelistic zeal for saving souls that was characteristic of another generation; and yet, today's Disciples still believe in the possibility and importance of Christian transformation, and are committed to the church as a vehicle of God's love to the world.

3. Outdated or improper methods of starting new churches. The Pastor-Developer model of starting new churches (the denomination's primary tool in the 1980s) was based on the successful 1950s campaign. The situation of the 1990s is very different, and this new situation demands utilization of a variety of

new models for starting new congregations.

4. Cultural shifts. The cultural upheaval of the 1960s had an influence on church life, as does the transient nature of the U.S. in the 1990s. Churches once known as mainline no longer play the predominant role in shaping culture that they once did. If these mainline denominational churches are to be able to meet the needs of today's culture, they will have to find new ways of doing so.

West Coast Disciples were most effective at the task of starting new congregations when they had a clear and appropriate theology of evangelism, when they were able to adapt methods and translate the message of the gospel to the culture of their time, and when they had strong, vital leaders who were dedicated to that purpose. The shifting role of regions, changing theological identity, outdated methods, and cultural shifts have all led to the loss of a mandate for starting new Disciples congregations. With it are gone the know how, the drive to be creative, the urge to find appropriate theologies, and the desire to develop new methods for starting new congregations. If West Coast Disciples are to be effective at starting new congregations in the 1990s, they will have to re-claim that mandate. They will need to develop clear and appropriate theologies of evangelism, they will need to understand the culture in which they live, and work hard at translating their understanding of the gospel message to that culture. If the Disciples are to meet the task of starting new congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s, they will have to develop leaders who are worthy of the great task which lies ahead. The following chapters of this project address these issues with the intent of developing leaders needed for this task in this time.

For Further Discussion

1. How and in what year was the congregation in which you currently worship started? Does this fit with the historic pattern described above? In what way(s)?

2. Who were the leaders instrumental in the early days of your congregation? Were they regional staff, the founding pastor, lay persons or a combination thereof?

3. How do you define the term evangelism? What importance does the role of evangelism play in your desire to work with starting new churches? What is the role of mission or outreach? What are other important factors in starting a new church?

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- Swander, C. F. Supplement to Making Disciples in Oregon. [St. Louis]: n.p., 1946.

Ware, E. B. History of the Disciples of Christ in California. Healdsburg, Calif.: [F. W. Cooke], 1916.

Consult your local church historian for the history of your congregation.

For additional assistance contact the Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1101 Nineteenth Avenue, South, Nashville, Tennessee, 37212-2196.

Chapter 3

The Message: Towards a Disciples Theology of Evangelism for New Church Development

In the last chapter I explored the patterns and methods of starting Disciples of Christ congregations on the Pacific Slope from the 1840s through the 1980s. Congregations were established for a number of reasons and in a variety of ways, with one of the most important factors for successfully starting new congregations being an appropriate and pervasive theology of evangelism. In the early years Disciples believed it was their responsibility to start new congregations wherever and whenever the occasion presented itself. This belief was a direct reflection of an evangelical theology that was pervasive among Disciples through the middle part of the twentieth century. In the early part of the 1900s the evangelical theology of the Disciples gave way to theologies that were more socially oriented. By the 1960s Disciples had so wholly embraced a socially orientated approach to ministry that regions had begun shifting personnel and financial resources from starting new congregations to mission causes.¹

In a recent article, noted Disciple scholars Clark M. Williamson and Charles R. Blaisdell argue that the current “predicament” for Disciples (i.e., the loss of social influence, decreasing membership numbers, etc.) is rooted in the lack of

¹ McCullough, p. 3.

an adequate theological framework from which to work.² Williamson and Blaisdell believe that, theologically, the Disciples of Christ have been presented with only two options since the middle of the twentieth century. Both options have been inadequate and have served to polarize Disciples along lines of “conservative and liberal.”³

According to Williamson and Blaisdell, the conservative branch of the Christian Church (the Churches of Christ and Independent Christian Churches) “reflect [a] closed off structure of a restricted self.”⁴ Theologies of this nature allow people to have a “clear, if rigid, identity and a constricted self-process. . . . They have clear identities; they know who they are and what they believe. They are not involved in ecumenical conversation, nor do they manifest great concern for the liberation of people or the earth itself. . . .”⁵

On the other hand, according to Williamson and Blaisdell, the liberal side of the Christian Church (the Disciples of Christ) reflects the “protean” personality trait. Disciples “lack fixity or boundaries and are marked by fluidity. . . [they are] open to all influence from everywhere, virtually taking diversity as their norm, they lack identity and centeredness. Wanting to make nothing a test of fellowship, they fail to recognize that some things are incompatible with the gospel.”⁶

² Clark M Williamson and Charles R. Blaisdell, “Disciples Contributions and Responses to Mainstream Protestant Theology, 1880-1953,” A Case Study of Mainstream Protestantism: The Disciples’ Relation to American Culture, 1880-1989, ed. D. Newell Williams (St Louis: Chalice Press, 1991), 107-38.

³ Williamson and Blaisdell, 108.

⁴ Williamson and Blaisdell, 108.

⁵ Williamson and Blaisdell, 108.

⁶ Williamson and Blaisdell, 108.

If this critique by Williamson and Blaisdell is accurate, it means that a mere shift to a more evangelical theology by liberal Disciples will not adequately address the problem of finding an appropriate theology. Liberal Disciples could not accept a traditional closed off theology of evangelism because they are marked by a protean personality of openness.

The development of an appropriate theology of evangelism is not only important for defining the thought processes of the Disciples of Christ; it may be of existential importance as well. Early disciples had a clear understanding of their task in the world which was based upon a strong belief in the gospel message of salvation. Early Disciples of Christ were empasioned with a plea for Christian unity and restoration of the New Testament church. This passion grew out of the biblical and theological mandate to share the gospel with all the world (i.e., to evangelize). However, the situation of the frontier of the United States provided some resistance to their ability to share the good news because of a heavy amount of sectarian religious practices. Denominational divisions forged on European soil, and transfered to the U.S. frontier, prevented Disciples from sharing the gospel message. Out of a desire to fulfill the gospel mandate, Disciples developed an acceptance of diverse theological practices and beliefs, as long as people could agree to remain united in Christ. For early Disciples, the requirement for being a Christian was a professed faith in Jesus Christ, and not an adherence to a specific creed.

With the switch from an evangelical theology to a more social theology in the early 1900s, Disciples lost part (a large part) of their reason for being. In this regard Keith Watkins, professor at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, writes:

The puzzle is why are Disciples churches [today] so ineffective? Of course we suffer from the same debilitating

factors that afflict other mainline churches. We, however, have declined more than others; and there is less evidence that we are recovering. My answer to the question, in brief, is that our understanding of the gospel was so tied up with our “plea” to restore the New Testament Church that when we lost confidence in the plea we lost our ability to comprehend the gospel. If we have no gospel then we can’t build a strong church.⁷

The vision for a strong church must be linked to the gospel and will, necessarily, be grounded in a desire to share a unique Disciples understanding of the good news of Jesus with the world in which we live.

Early Disciples understood the theme of working for Christian unity and accepting diversity as a tool for breaking down the sectarian walls which kept people from experiencing the grace of God. Restoring and reuniting the New Testament church was a means of getting at the real issue, which was the message of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ. Watkins believes that: “Unity was instrumental rather than essential. Unity was the result of concentrating upon the central tenets of the gospel and letting other matters fall away.”⁸

The divisive nature of the American culture of the 1990s suggests that the theme of accepting diversity while moving toward unity in Christ appears still to be an appropriate way of relating the gospel (see Chapter 4). The task for Disciples in the 1990s and beyond is the development of a new theological understanding which accepts diversity as it helps to define clearly the unique mission of the Disciples of Christ. In this chapter I begin the process of developing a Disciples theology of evangelism for the 1990s, which is both open and clearly definitive of who we are as Disciples of Christ.

For any theology to be appropriate for Disciples, it must meet two

⁷ Keith Watkins, letter to author, 30 October 1992.

⁸ Watkins, letter.

requirements of historic importance for Disciples: (1) it must be biblically based, and (2) it must respect Disciples historic preference for unity within diversity. Early Disciples sought both to restore the Christian church of the New Testament and to unite Christians of all creeds. Alexander Campbell and his contemporaries believed that sectarian separation was sinful. They taught that credal statements should not be used as a test of faith as a requirement for church membership. Modern day Disciples are the heirs of those beliefs. Disciples believe strongly that Christians ought to be united in Christ in spite of a diversity of beliefs. Disciples have also historically been a “people of the book” (i.e., the Bible). Thus, for a theology to be appropriate to Disciples, it must be biblically based.

Following are my conclusions based upon a study of biblical and historical sources. What follows does not serve as the definitive answer on evangelism, rather a starting point. Any individual or group interested in starting a new congregation must add their own study in order to determine where they stand on the theological question of evangelism. Persons must seek answers for themselves around the issues of sin and salvation and the message of Jesus Christ. Each new congregation, and its leadership, will ideally draw from the resources of the Bible and of Disciples history to develop their own theology of evangelism which will enable them in the task of starting a new congregation. The goal of this chapter is to provide resources for those individuals and congregations in doing that reflective work.

A Biblical Exploration of the Theology of Evangelism

From their beginnings the Disciples of Christ have placed emphasis on Bible study and individual interpretation thereof. Because Disciples have no official credal statement, the Bible has a special place in the faith life of

Disciples. Disciples believe that all Christians have the responsibility to study the scriptures and determine for themselves God's revelation for their lives. Thus, development of a theology of evangelism for Disciples must begin with a study of the biblical precepts.

This study of evangelism begins with an exploration of the original meaning of the words used for evangelism in the Greek New Testament. According to the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament the word for evangelism appears in the form of a verb as well as a noun.

The verbal form of the word is *εὐαγγελίζομαι* which means: "to proclaim good news."⁹ In the New Testament *εὐαγγελίζομαι* refers to the good news of Jesus Christ. According to New Testament usage, the story of Jesus Christ is an inclusive message of God's good news for all people, and, therefore, proclamation of that news is important. In the form of the verb, *εὐαγγελίζομαι* is most frequently used in Luke/Acts and the writings of Paul. It is not found in the Johannean corpus or Mark. It is used as a verb only once in Matthew and few times in other New Testament writings. According to Kittle:

The content [of *εὐαγγελίζομαι*] is Jesus himself (Gal. 1:16), his passion and resurrection (1 Peter 1:11 ff.; Acts 17:18), the kingdom (Acts 8:12), the OT in its witness to Christ (Acts 8:35), the word (Acts 15:35), and the faith (Gal. 1:23). Parallel terms are preaching, teaching, and witnessing

εὐαγγελίζομαι is not just speaking but proclaiming with power to the accompaniment of signs. It thus brings healing (Mt. 4:23), joy (Acts 8:8), salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-2). Being proclamation of the good news of God, it carries with it both the offer and the power of salvation.¹⁰

⁹ G. Friederich, "Euangelizomai", *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged, ed. Gerhard Kittle and Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1985), 268.

¹⁰ Friederich, 268-69.

In its verbal form there is an understanding that the promise of good news is for now as well as for the future. The proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ itself is both a promise and a fulfillment.

The noun form of the word is εὐαγγέλιον. It can be translated as either “good news” or “gospel.”¹¹ In the New Testament εὐαγγέλιον is most frequently found in the writings of Paul. Mark’s gospel uses the noun eight times, Matthew uses it four times and Luke uses it only twice in Acts. By comparison, Paul uses the noun form of the word sixty times in his writings. It is also found once each in 1 Peter and Revelation.¹² In the synoptics, according to Kittle, “the proclamation of Jesus is undoubtedly good news, and he himself is its proclaimer. . . . Jesus realizes that he is not just bringing a new teaching but bringing himself as the content of his message, so that for the disciples εὐαγγέλιον implies disclosure of the messianic secret.”¹³

In the New Testament Paul uses the word εὐαγγέλιον frequently. Paul’s mission was to preach the εὐαγγέλιον to the gentiles as well as to the Jews. The message refers to both acts/deed (2 Cor. 8:18; Phil. 4:3, 15) and content (1 Cor. 9:14). According to Kittle, the content of Paul’s theology of εὐαγγέλιον is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a fulfillment of God’s promise (Rom. 1:1 ff). It is a message of both joy and judgment (1 Cor. 15). It brings salvation (Eph. 1:13), and combines both judgment and grace (Rom. 1:16-17). Kittle writes, “fellowship in it is not just cooperation in evangelism but fellowship in the salvation it brings.”¹⁴

¹¹ Friederich, 267.

¹² Friederich, 270.

¹³ Friederich, 270.

¹⁴ Friederich, 271.

Paul's concern was that this εὐαγγέλιον of Jesus should be for all people, both Jew and Greek. He was concerned with the divisions among Christians in the churches he knew (such as Corinth and Galatia), and held that the body of Christ (i.e., Christians) should be united (1Cor. 12). He preached that the Law (Old Testament) and the gospel of Jesus Christ are not in direct opposition to one another (1 Tim 1:8-11). For Paul the gospel is a fulfillment of the Law. This was the concern behind Paul's message that "salvation" is in Christ alone" meaning not in the Law (Gal. 2). Thus, Paul held an inclusive understanding of the gospel.

Evangelism can therefore be defined as: "the process of proclaiming the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." It comes both as a message (noun) and as an action (verb). The message includes Christ's death and resurrection as a means of salvation and as an implementation of the Kingdom of God. Evangelism is to be inclusive of all persons. There is an element of judgment, but that is not the main focus of the good news. Evangelism is a word of God's love, grace and salvation for all humankind. The heavy use of the root word as both noun and verb would suggest that the method of evangelism is as important as the message. Evangelism is good news in both word and deed. Evangelism calls for Christians to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the whole world.

An Open Door Approach to Evangelism (Accepting Diversity)

The second criterion for developing an appropriate Disciples theology of evangelism is the need for such a theology to respect our tradition of unity within diversity. The Disciples of Christ movement was founded under the belief

that sectarian division among Christians is sinful. Disciples have traditionally held the belief that the only credal statement necessary for membership in the Christian community is confession of faith in Jesus Christ. When a person desires to become a Christian and unite in fellowship with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) they are asked to make a "good confession of faith."¹⁵ From the beginning Disciples have understood credal tests of faith to be divisive and exclusive, whereas the Gospel of Jesus Christ is inclusive and requires unity. A long time slogan of the Disciples has been "no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible."

In recent years a debate has been waged among Disciples over an official stance on salvation in Jesus Christ alone. At the 1987 General Assembly, a resolution "Concerning Salvation in Jesus Christ" (Resolution 8728) was presented by a group of theologically conservative Disciples. This resolution launched a denomination-wide debate that had potential for splitting the church.

In church matters it is sometimes difficult to sort out politics from theology. Resolution 8728 presented such a dilemma for Disciples. On the one hand, (theologically) Disciples were in general agreement that our good confession of faith in Jesus Christ defines who we are as Christians. On the other hand, Disciples were quick to note that Resolution 8728 bore striking resemblance to a credal statement which could be used as a test of faith. Being born and bred in the opposition of such tests of faith, the Assembly was not anxious to pass such a resolution. Instead, Resolution 8728 was referred to a Commission on Theology which was to study and report on the issue at the following General

¹⁵ The term "good confession of faith" comes from I Tim. 6:12. It is for Disciples the only confession of faith necessary for church membership. The statement is the same that Peter made to Jesus found in Matt. 16:16, "You [Jesus] are the Christ, the Son of the living God." See Ronald E. Osborn, The Faith We Affirm: Basic Beliefs of the Disciples of Christ (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1979), 25.

Assembly meeting in Indianapolis.

In 1989 the General Assembly received that report in the form of another resolution (8926) in which the following statement was affirmed:

The General Assembly. . .reaffirms our belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and proclaims Him as Lord and Savior of the world; and we acknowledge that no statement of faith can fully express the whole faith of the whole church. We offer the report as one resource to congregations, regions, general units, organizations, and institutions within the church for study and response. We urge ongoing dialogue and searching that we may grow in our understanding of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and in our freedom to embrace all who name Jesus Christ as Savior.¹⁶

General Assembly Resolution No. 8926 is divided into three sections. The first section addresses the issue of the need and historic precedence for the church to confess its faith. The good confession of faith provides identity for who we are as Christians. Anything beyond that becomes dogmatic and coercive. In that regard Resolution No. 8926 states, "Coercion violates the very nature of faith which is a free response to [God's] grace."¹⁷ In defining the church as a confessing community, Resolution 8926 reads: "the church must confess its faith humbly, leaving final judgment in the hands of God. While centering its life on faith in Christ, the church must not insist that all its members interpret the biblical witness in the same way."¹⁸

The second section of 8926 deals with the biblical foundation of the church's confession. The findings in this section hold up a variety of confessions of faith made in the New Testament. The resolution concludes:

¹⁶ Yearbook and Directory, 1990, of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), ed. Shirley L. Cox (Indianapolis: Office of the General Minister and President, 1990), 287 - 92

¹⁷ Resolution 8926, 287.

¹⁸ Resolution 8926, 287.

We should see that the common element under all of the New Testament expressions of faith about salvation is that God is the author of salvation. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the pivotal disclosure and realization of God's redeeming and saving action of gracious love on behalf of a sinful humanity.¹⁹

The third, and most lengthy section, of Resolution 8926 contains a theological statement regarding the church's confession of faith. It reads:

to confess, in accord with the apostolic witness, that Jesus Christ is 'Savior' is to speak--because of the Gospel--not only of who Jesus is, but who God is, and who we are in relation to God. The confession declares this: God reveals in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth that the very being of God is gracious love for all creation. Who is God? The God of Israel, maker of heaven and earth, whose very being is gracious love. Who are we? Those who have been brought to understand themselves, and all creation, to be utterly reliant upon the gracious love of God. Who is Jesus Christ? The one through whom, by God's grace, we have been brought to this understanding.²⁰

This third section also deals with traditional ideologies such as sin and salvation. In this section the point is again clearly stated that in matters of sin it is "not the church, but God, [who] decides who shall be saved."²¹ Resolution 8926 reminds us that God's grace is a free gift and salvation is given freely through Jesus Christ.

Another issue addressed in this section is use of the word "only" in confessional statements. Resolution 8926 notes a variety of uses for the word "only" in confessional statements, some of which are appropriate and some of which are not. In short, when the word "only" is used as a means by which some are excluded from the grace and love of God, the word is used

¹⁹ Resolution 8926, 288.

²⁰ Resolution 8926, 289.

²¹ Resolution 8926, 290.

inappropriately according to Resolution 8926. Again, salvation is a gift from God and does not rightly belong in the hands of people.

Because of the strong historical precedent of unity within diversity, an appropriate Disciples theology of evangelism for the 1990s must be rooted in the findings of Resolution No. 8926: God is the only one who can judge rightly. The witness of the Gospel is that God's love is freely given to the world through the person of Jesus Christ; the church is defined by its confession of faith in Jesus Christ, but it cannot (and must not) appropriately use that confession to try to exclude others from the grace and love of God.

The content of Resolution 8926 is good news for many people living in today's culture. In developing an appropriate theology for the 1990s Disciples must embrace our historical precedence for unity, and maintain an acceptance of diverse beliefs. Resolution 8926 is an appropriate statement of the historic preference for unity within diversity by Disciples. Such a statement might well become the basis of a Disciples evangelistic message for the 1990s and beyond.

Resolution 8926 concludes with an affirmation of faith. This affirmation is a clear definition of traditional Disciples belief regarding salvation and grace:

When Christians seek to explain why we confess that Jesus Christ is Savior and what we rightly mean by our confession, we are by no means dealing with abstract theories. Our confession wells up from the very depths of our Christian experience. The power unto salvation which is experienced in Jesus Christ is the experience of God's gracious love poured out upon an unworthy sinner. God's grace is so amazing, God's love so awesome, God's mercy so sweeping in its embrace, that even I -- one who was myself utterly lost am included in it. We are sometimes tempted to feel that as Christians we deserve God's grace, and we then wonder why others fail to be as deserving as we are. But in our best moments, humbled by our awareness that God's all-inclusive love has extended even to us, we utter prayers of thanksgiving

to God.²²

A Disciples Theology of Evangelism (or Why Start New Churches)

The New Congregation Establishment handbook for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) offers five reasons for starting new congregations: (1) to reach the unchurched; (2) to achieve an inclusive church; (3) to maintain a Disciples witness and presence in the world; (4) to follow moving populations; and (5) to meet diverse and changing needs in today's society.²³ Some of these reasons are directly related to the cause of evangelism. Others are only tangentially related.

Inherent as a theological and practical premise for starting new Disciples congregations is a belief that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) holds a particular and unique understanding of the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that the world in which we live will be better off with (or at least needs to hear) our interpretation of the Gospel message. Because of our distinctive interpretation of the Gospel, Disciples hold a particular understanding of evangelism.

According to historians the most distinguishing characteristics of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are: (1) a tolerance for diversity within unity; (2) the centrality of the Bible as scripture; (3) the importance of Christian education (with emphasis on individual study and interpretation of scripture); (4) baptism by immersion of adult believers for the remission of sins; (5) shared leadership among both clergy and lay persons; (6) and the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper.²⁴ The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is not the

²² Resolution 8926, 292.

²³ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), New Congregation Establishment, 11-18.

²⁴ These characteristics have been clearly stated in several sources. Among them see C.

only Mainline Protestant denomination for which these characteristics are important, but these are identifying marks of the Disciples.²⁵

No official doctrinal or credal statements exist for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). All individuals are expected to study the scriptures and search their hearts in order to formulate their own rational interpretation. Thus, there is no official doctrine of evangelism for Disciples; even so, some historic preferences exist.

In a book by Herb Miller, some major preferences for Disciples theology on evangelism are outlined. Miller believes that "the primary goal of evangelism is to help people form a personal relationship with Jesus Christ."²⁶ He writes, "Disciples understand evangelism in at least twenty different ways. Nineteen of these have little connection with an evangelistic theology based in biblical Christianity."²⁷ He goes on to list those twenty ways, and at the end of the list concludes with one that he believes to be the most valid motivation for evangelism: "the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ."²⁸ The rest of the booklet is Miller's defense of what he calls a "holistic biblical Christianity."

Miller believes that current Disciples evangelism methods are not appropriate for the Gospel because they focus on method rather than message. He believes that the biblical message is that God seeks a relationship with

Earl Gibbs, "The Gospel of the Disciples and the 21st Century," Impact, no. 18 (1987) :36-45.

²⁵ From research done for Chapter 2 of this project I would add a seventh characteristic: The desire to start new congregations based upon a pervasive and appropriate theology of evangelism.

²⁶ Herb Miller, Moving Toward a Biblical Theology of Evangelism: A Five-Session Study for Members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (Lubbock, Tex.: Net Press, 1987), 5.

²⁷ Miller, 2.

²⁸ Miller, 5.

humans through Jesus Christ, and that this relationship is the means of salvation.

In his booklet Miller claims that Disciples have placed too much emphasis on our “Polar Star” of Christian Unity. Instead he advocates a somewhat narrow interpretation of “the truth” of Jesus Christ as the only means by which we receive salvation.²⁹ Many Disciples will take issue with Miller on a few of these points.

Some who oppose Miller’s claim do so on the grounds that making such a statement is tantamount to requiring a credal statement as a test of faith. Thus they disagree in principal, even though they have and would continue to make their own good confession of faith.

Other Disciples would take issue with Miller’s statement about the overemphasis on Christian unity. Indeed many Disciples would claim that unity is the only valid pursuit of Christians, even as Miller claims the centrality of evangelistic concerns. Both understandings are valid and can be argued from both a biblical and historical standpoint. One of the distinguishing marks of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has been historically, and continues to be, an emphasis on Christian unity. Early on in our history, Disciples claimed unity as “our polar star.”³⁰ In his book about the basic beliefs of the Disciples of Christ, Ronald E. Osborn lifts the biblical and historic importance of our ecumenical roots. Osborn writes:

In describing the particular mind of Disciples of Christ we do not want to seem boastful or partisan. Disciples resist any tendency toward a sectarian emphasis. Our intention is to read the biblical message in the light of the common judgment of the whole Christian community and for the sake of the whole church

²⁹ Miller, 16-20.

The bible is an ecumenical book. To read it rightly, we must read it ecumenically. When we read it rightly, it will make us ecumenical. Disciples have sought for themselves, and for all Christians everywhere, an ecumenical mind.³¹

Other Disciples have, however, felt that evangelistic efforts ought to be the primary emphasis of the Christian life. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Disciple evangelist Jesse Bader sought to remind Disciples of the importance of evangelistic work. Bader's admonition to pastors and lay persons was: "what our Lord made primary we have no right to make secondary."³²

The claims of Herb Miller about Disciples of Christ theology will meet with opposition; however, he does list some points upon which most Disciples can agree. The following points would likely meet with consensus among Disciples about the importance and meaning of evangelism: (1) Among Disciples there is a need to be clear about the biblical and historical mandates of evangelism; (2) We need to focus on message rather than method; (3) Disciples believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News; (4) Jesus Christ is, and must continue to be, the center of the Christian faith; and (5) Christians need to emphasize the importance of a personal relationship with God which is made possible through Jesus Christ. These five points are appropriate for a Disciples theology of evangelism. Thus, they are helpful to remember in the pursuit of starting new congregations.

The rationale for starting new churches strikes at the very center of what it means to be a Christian and why Christians gather together in congregations. Christian churches exist primarily for three reasons: (1) to worship and serve

³¹ Osborn, The Faith We Affirm, 21.

³² McAllister and Tucker, 327.

the living God whom we know in the person of Jesus Christ; (2) to nurture and care for the physical, emotional and spiritual life of those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; and (3) to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to the world through mission, witness and service. New congregations are started for a variety of reasons. When Disciples move from one location to another they need new places of nurture, study, outreach and worship. If there is no Disciples congregation in the new area, they may desire to start one. New congregations can sometimes be more receptive to meeting diverse and changing needs of society, because their rituals are not likely to be as concretized as those of established congregations. New congregations are also started as means for bringing non-Christians into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

One of the primary motivations for starting new Disciples congregations in the 1990s is to reach to unchurched people.³³ There are about 90 million people in the United States who have no church affiliation. The New Congregation Establishment handbook classifies these “unchurched” persons into two basic subgroups: one “group which has no Christian memory” and another which consists of “former church members, the disenchanted, and those who tried organized religion and were not fulfilled.”³⁴ A major reason for starting new congregations is to reach these persons. Studies reveal that 40 - 60 percent of the members of new congregations come from these two groups of individuals.³⁵ Consequently, new churches are, for Disciples, evangelistic in

³³ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), New Congregation Establishment, 11.

³⁴ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), New Congregation Establishment, 11.

³⁵ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), New Congregation Establishment, 11.

nature. In fact, if these figures are accurate, they may imply that starting new congregations is one of the most effective methods of evangelism among Disciples.

Studies also indicate that “new church establishment has been a positive factor in slowing the decline of membership” among Disciples on the West Coast.³⁶ Evangelism, as we have defined it above, is the process of telling the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and does not specifically relate to membership numbers. The concern of slowing membership decline is not specific evangelistic concern, and yet it is a related motivation for starting new Disciples congregations. Starting new congregations is both a means of evangelism and a method for increasing denominational membership.

Another helpful way of looking at new church development may be for us to understand the task of starting new congregations as mission work. Since the early 1900s, Disciples have been strong in developing and supporting overseas missions with the goal of spreading the Good News of the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world. The spark for missions among Disciples has been provided by leadership from women. The Christian Women’s Board of Missions (CWBM) led the way for Disciples mission causes in the early decades of the 1900s.³⁷ Since that time Disciples have placed a great deal of emphasis on both home and foreign mission work. For Disciples, mission and evangelism are historically and theologically connected.

At the 1989 National Evangelism Conference prior to the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Kennon L. Callahan challenged

³⁶ Gibbs, The Impact of New Church Establishment, 1.

³⁷ McAllister and Tucker, 313-38.

the conference with the statement that "we are now living in the mission field."³⁸ Callahan's belief is based on the presence of 90 million unchurched persons in the U. S. (mentioned above). The culture we live in can no longer be considered to be a Christian culture; thus, we are living in the mission field. Perhaps Disciples can successfully rally support for starting new congregations by emphasizing the theological impetus of mission along with that of evangelism in new church ventures. By so doing Disciples would advantageously play upon the historic strength of concern for world-wide missions.

Conclusion

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has a particular understanding of the Gospel message -- a distinctly Disciple way of translating that message into the language of our culture, a way that is biblically based and includes a concern for unity among all Christians. The rationale for starting new congregations must, first and foremost, be the concern for sharing the message of God's good news in Jesus Christ. Evangelism and mission concerns are of priority when it comes to starting a new congregation. Disciples start new congregations because of the desire to translate the message of the Gospel to the world through the symbols and traditions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Disciples firmly believe in the unity of all Christians and are highly accepting of diversity. Starting new congregations is one of the most effective ways we can share our understanding of the Gospel message.

³⁸ Kennon L. Callahan, "Evangelism on a Mission Field: Motivational Resources," (Indianapolis: NEA Evangelism Conference, 27-28 July, 1989), cassette.

For Further Discussion

1. How would you explain the Gospel of Jesus Christ to somebody? In other words, Why is the Gospel good news for you? What does "evangelism" mean to you?
2. What are the most distinguishing features of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for you? How would/do you share those features with someone who is not familiar with the Disciples.
3. In your opinion, why would a group of Christians feel compelled to start a new congregation? What are the biblical and theological rationale for starting new congregations?
4. Why should we start new congregations?

Resources

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Chapter 4

The Mission of the Disciples of Christ in the Contemporary World

Because of the vastness and variety of the North American continent, the United States can be divided into several distinctive regions. Each region can be defined by distinctive characteristics such as geography, language, and social expectations. Particular combinations of factors will give a particular region a sociological flavor which may not be typical of other regions. These factors are influential of social, political, ethical, and economic practices of each region. The Pacific slope states of Washington, Oregon, and California make up one such region. The Pacific slope has a unique understanding of itself which will be defined below.

An understanding of the factors that influence a specific geographic region may help determine the shape (the medium or methods) of the church's mission and ministry in a particular geographic region. The church's message will necessarily continue to be the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see Chapter 3). But the methods of effectively sharing that message with the world are determined by the way in which the culture is available to receiving the message.

In this chapter the sociological, political, ethical, and economic factors which influence church growth and development on the West Coast are examined. In this chapter the importance of developing a clear Mission Statement and method for implementing the mission of a congregation are also explored. That

exploration includes a discussion of the importance of sociological analysis as a basis for understanding the culture in which a congregation seeks to minister. This chapter provides a snapshot of the culture of the Pacific Slope in the 1990s. Listed are some of the important issues and trends for the Pacific Slope (as I perceive them), and identification of how those trends may be different from the trends of the 1950s and 1960s (the era when Disciples were last successful in starting new congregations). Concluding this chapter is a section on how the Disciples of Christ can minister to the cultural milieu of the Pacific Slope in the 1990s, and particularly how the Disciples of Christ can seek to reach the variety of cultures represented on the Pacific Slope.

Central to the interpretation of the Gospel message of the Disciples of Christ is an attitude of accepting diverse beliefs and practices within the body of Christ. The Disciples have traditionally prided themselves on being open to a wide range of Christian beliefs. Disciples have held to the slogan "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things love." The only credal statement required for church membership has been the good confession of faith that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and Lord and Savior of the World." The Mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) on the Pacific Slope in the twenty-first Century will necessarily include this interpretation of the Gospel.

The Mission Statement

The culture of the Pacific Slope is pluralistic in nature. Diversity of beliefs, experiences, and practices are drawn from a variety of racial and ethnic groups which live on the West Coast. The population of the West Coast is influenced not only by the beliefs and practices of the dominant culture (i.e., middle class, white, Protestant America), it is also influenced greatly by immigrants from

different parts of the nation and world. In such a diverse cultural setting, the Church can not take for granted that people will respond to the simple proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians must be sensitive to the culture and proclaim the Gospel in terms that the culture will be able to understand. It is the responsibility of the church to seek to translate the Gospel to the culture in which it lives.

Translation and interpretation of the Gospel can take place in a variety of ways. Art forms of language, music, visual art, and drama are useful in the translation of the Gospel to the culture. Interpretation of the Gospel message can occur when Christians provide an example of Christians living, or through Christian social services, or by Christians seeking to bring about social change. In order for a congregation (particularly a new one) to be able to interpret the message of the Gospel into the language of the culture, the congregation must be clear on its particular mission.¹ A congregation must have an understanding of its unique call to ministry in the world in order for it to successfully provide that ministry.

At a Pastor Developer training session in September of 1991, the trainers from the general offices of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) included a section on the development of a mission statement. In a handout for that purpose the mission statement question was asked: "What is God calling our particular congregation to do and be at this time and place in our faith journey?"² According to the handout :

¹ Note: The word mission is sometimes used to discuss the outreach or service aspects of a congregation. In this project I am using the term "mission" to mean the overall purpose, goals and direction of a local congregation. In this way mission is the corporate understanding of a congregation for its existence and ministry. Here the word takes on the whole meaning of how a congregation understands itself and how God calls it to be "church" in a particular time and place.

² Edwards, 19 - 21.

A new congregation seeking a clear sense of mission begins to address the following issues: 1. What does scripture and our denominational tradition tell us about our mission as a congregation? 2. What unique and specific needs and interest would potential members look to our congregation to find fulfillment? 3. What specific needs in our community can and should our new congregation be seeking to address? 4. What specific needs in society and the world can and should our new congregation be seeking to address? 5. What gifts (corporately and as individual members) do our congregation have to offer in the above questions?³

Once a congregation is able to address clearly its particular mission in the world, it then goes about the process of developing a method for implementing that mission (i.e., goals and objectives). One method for understanding the church as a whole in regard to its mission statement is included in Appendix C of this project. That method utilizes a model of discourse involving contextualization of an issue or action.⁴ An item of ministry (i.e., an issue or an action) is addressed according to a variety of elements related to the mission statement of the congregation. Central to this process of discourse are the questions: How does a congregation reach a decision on an issue or action? How do the factors of education, theology, ethics, history, etc. effect a congregation's response to or actions regarding a particular issue? How does a specific issue or program relate to the overall mission and goals of the congregation?

In this process an issue or an action of a congregation would be placed on a theoretical pallet for examination. Questions are then directed at the issue or action from virtually every aspect of congregational life (theological, missional, and practical). On this pallet are included concerns of evangelism, theology,

³ Handout, Pastor Developer Training, Indianapolis, 1991.

⁴ For a deeper explanation of this process see Allen J. Moore, "A Social Theory of Religious Education", in Religious Education As Social Transformation, ed. Allen J. Moore (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1989), 29 - 33.

pastoral care, morality and ethics, as well as finances, worship life, congregational and denominational history, concern for social service and/or social activism, the congregation's general mission, the context of the surrounding community (the city, state, region, nation and world), and a variety of other factors.

Practicality dictates that not every action or issue could be submitted to this type of dialogue. Some issues or actions of a congregation will require a more immediate decision than is made possible by this method. Because of the costly time allocations necessary for this type of discourse, some issues would not be seen to be as important as others. Prior commitments of time and finances would preclude others in the process, these limitations may also limit discussion of a topic. And yet the church is called to wrestle with pertinent issues in this way as a part of its faithfulness to the God of all creation.

Crucial to this model of discourse is a clear understanding of the mission of a congregation through its mission statement. Of equal importance is the willingness of a congregation to enter into this type of discussion regarding their mission. If a congregation is to fulfill its unique mission of translating the Gospel to the world, it will have to do both.

Sociological Analysis

In order for the church to be able to minister to the world in which it lives it must have a clear picture of the culture and how it functions. If a primary purpose of the church is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the purpose of doing sociological analysis is to understand how that gospel message can best be translated to the language of the specific culture in which ministry is performed.

In his book, U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches, Tex Sample categorizes

the culture of the United States in regards to the influence of certain ethical principals. Borrowing from the work of Daniel Yankovich, Sample notes that the generations born prior to 1946 have been primarily informed by an ethic of “self-denial”.⁵ According to Yankovich and Sample, “the self-denial people of today have two major events that permanently shaped their consciousness: the Great Depression and World War II.”⁶ There are three basic parts to the self-denial principal: (1) “an abiding commitment to sacrifice and a conviction that immediate gratification is to be postponed for the sake of long-term gain, especially when that gain serves the family, one’s child, one’s spouse”; (2) the understanding that “one worked hard--and had to--to provide for the necessities of life”; and (3) “respectability.”⁷

On the other hand, the generation born between 1946 and 1960 (the Baby Boomers) has been identified by a different set of ethical principals which Sample and Yankovich identify as the ethic of self-fulfillment. Central to the ethic of self-fulfillment are the precepts that (1) “life is intrinsically valuable, which means it is not to be denied for the sake of something else”; (2) “life is to be creatively and emotionally expressive”; and (3) affluence is a basic right owed to everyone by society.⁸ Regarding the mission of the church to this group Sample observes:

Now consider this: the generation missing from the mainline denominations is this group of young adults in their twenties, thirties, and early forties, and the basic reason for the decline of the mainline denominations is that this generation, alienated from major institutions in

⁵ Tex Sample, U. S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches: A Key to Reaching People in the 90's (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 11.

⁶ Sample, 14.

⁷ Sample, 12 - 13.

⁸ Sample, 15 - 16.

the society, simply dropped out of the church. The fact is that the more strongly one holds to an ethic of self-fulfillment, the less likely one is to belong to the church. The result is that churches are filled primarily with people committed to a self-denial ethic, which poses the direct challenge of how a church of self-denial people can attract self-fulfillment baby boomers. Aggravating this problem further is the fact that people in these two lifestyles see things so differently, approach life so disparately, and evaluate matters so oppositely that it can be extra-ordinarily difficult to get them together.⁹

If the church is going to be successful in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with this group, some translation on behalf of the church is going to have to take place.

In addition to these two groups Sample identifies a third, emerging ethical principal which he calls the "new ethic of commitment." This ethic is similar to the ethic of self-fulfillment except without the psychology of affluence. Instead, this third group reflects two trends: (1) the knowledge of the "intrinsic value of life and its emotionally expressive possibilities [that] will not happen apart from deep and lasting relationships," and (2) the desire to do "something that counted."¹⁰

This study is helpful in understanding the general ethical principals of each generation, but is too simplistic and stereotypical to be useful in ministry for a specific congregation. Sample has also identified the U. S. culture in terms of cultural types which he identifies as the cultural left, right and middle. These types are related to the above ethical principals in a general way and are helpful in identifying specifics for ministry to any particular group.

The cultural left can be characterized by a "strong inner-direction"; they come from "affluent families" and tend to have a "deep and abiding commitment

⁹ Sample, 17.

¹⁰ Sample, 20.

to personal freedom and tolerance.”¹¹ In regards to religion this group is committed to the “New Age Movement” and are “least likely to attend church.”¹²

According to Sample the cultural right are “locally oriented and territorially rooted.”¹³ This group is not made up of a single racial or economic group, but rather is impacted by a diverse group of racial, ethnic, gender and economic conditions. They are the “respectables,” “the hard living,” and the “desperate poor.”¹⁴ Sample postulates that “the cultural right is made up of most farmers, blue collar workers, the lower-middle class, the poor, and the near-poor.”¹⁵ In regards to religion the cultural right is varied, ranging from a majority of mainline churches to fundamentalists and evangelicals. Politically they tend to be moderate to conservative and their political views are often based upon “their commitment to traditional values in the family and kinship ties.”¹⁶

Third is the group which Sample calls the cultural middle. They are characterized by a commitment to career, personal achievement, and expressive individualism. The cultural middle contains primarily three groups: the “Successful, the Strivers, and the Conflicted.”¹⁷ They tend to be highly mobile, yet place a high emphasis on the importance of family. Economically they are the middle class. Politically they range from conservative to liberal (depending upon their achieved level of “success”). In regards to religion they

¹¹ Sample, 26-27.

¹² Sample, 29.

¹³ Sample, 59.

¹⁴ Sample, 59-61.

¹⁵ Sample, 62.

¹⁶ Sample, 66.

¹⁷ Sample, 103.

tend to lean towards a rational faith and stress the importance of personal salvation.

In the concluding chapters of his book, Sample addresses the question of how the church can deal “respectfully, authentically, and transformatively with the three quite different lifestyles that now characterize U.S. Society.”¹⁸ In this regard he makes several suggestions based upon a congregation’s own understanding of their mission as it relates to the needs of the culture. To that end he emphasizes a “life-style specific”¹⁹ approach to ministry for which an understanding of the way the culture functions is essential for the translation and transmission of the Gospel message.

Sample’s work is based on his own deep conviction of “the power of Christ in culture transforming culture”²⁰ and the importance of the church in this mission. In conclusion he writes:

This is the source of our hope for the immediate future and finally for the completion of the creation and the reign of God. Our task is to see Christ in the faces of those where we do not expect to do so and to be hospitable to the messianic work afoot. To love Christ, and to love the neighbor in whom Christ comes, is to respect the journey over which the neighbor has come, to appreciate the struggles to make and keep life together, and not to miss the failure or the pain of those who seem to have it made. In the midst of all of these, we can trust that the Spirit of Christ is there and that the work of transformation is already under way.²¹

A Snapshot of the Pacific Slope

As has been stated above, in order for a congregation to minister effectively to the culture in which it is located, two things are necessary: (1) it must be clear

¹⁸ Sample, 139.

¹⁹ Sample, 148.

²⁰ Sample, 149.

²¹ Sample, 154.

regarding its own unique mission, and (2) it must have an understanding of the context in which it seeks to minister. In order for Disciples to be effective at starting congregations in the 1990s and beyond, these two concerns are of primary importance. This section provides an analysis of the cultural milieu of the Pacific Slope in the 1990s in order for the Disciples to provide ministry to that culture.

Assessing the milieu of a specific culture is primarily a matter of perspective. In a culture as diverse as the Pacific Slope it is neither easy nor wholly accurate for one to evaluate the present situation. It is even more precarious to predict the future. The world we live in is so subject to change that by the time this project reaches the reader, major changes or learnings may have occurred. Political, economic, and sociological research and analysis can be helpful, but they are limited in their scope. Thus, in this section a variety of approaches are utilized to help provide an understanding of the culture of the Pacific Slope in the 1990s. In this section I will use broad strokes to paint a portrait of the major concerns of West Coast culture as seen by the author.

This research is drawn from books, newspapers and magazines in which the articles reflect both a local and national perspective. Integral to the conclusions drawn here are the experiences of author who was born and raised in Oregon and lived in Oregon and California for most of his life. Others are encouraged to enter into this discussion through analysis of their own insights, experiences and understandings of the culture of the Pacific Slope.

The purpose of this section is to begin the process of establishing a cultural identity for the Pacific Slope so that Disciples are able to understand the way in which the mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) can provide ministry to the West Coast through the establishment of new congregations in the 1990s.

Historically, two factors influence the milieu of this region. Oregon and Washington (and to some extent California) are the end of frontier America. Manifest destiny was fulfilled when the settlers reached the Pacific Ocean. Tales of Lewis and Clark, the Oregon Trail, wagon trains and the California gold rush are important stories to the identity of this culture.

Important also are the indigenous peoples and the history of the Spanish missions. In Oregon and Washington the tribes of the northwest Indians have played an important role historically. In California the stories of indigenous peoples, the Missions and the earliest settlers from Mexico all played a role. These people and their stories have greatly influenced the history of this region and play an important part in the current political scene as well. In the Northwest, politicians and constituents frequently squabble over issues such as fishing rights; these were at one time promised to the Indians, and yet are coveted by the Oregon fishing industry. In the Southland, many contemporary concerns focus around the issues surrounding undocumented aliens from central America and Mexico. In one sense, these people are important to the economy because they provide a cheap source of agricultural labor. In another sense they are seen as a burden on the welfare and other social service systems.

A variety of ecological issues are of major concern for people living on the West WestCoast. Westerners live in close proximity to nature. Outdoor sports (including bicycling, fishing, hiking, skiing, surfing, etc.) are big business. So too are the utilization of a vast and plentiful amount of resources (oil, lumber, precious minerals, water, etc.). At times, decisions regarding the allocation of the rich resources of this region raise conflicts. Nature also plays a role in the debate, as natural phenomenon occur (i.e., earthquakes, volcanos, drought and flood).

According to a recent study by the Lilly Endowment, the spiritual climate of California is similar to that of Massachusetts. The authors of that study make the claim that "California is a surprising mix -- least religious in some ways and most in others. It can't be characterized as tending toward any religious average"22 Influencing this diversity are a large number of immigrants, the success of the New Age movement on the West Coast, and a high number of "unchurched" people.

The ethical climate of the West Coast is diverse, yet there is a certain moral complexion to it. According to the study by Patterson and Kim:

The people of the Pacific Rim rank first in the nation in: being willing to die for what they believe, using drugs, using force on other people, discussing sex with their spouses or lovers, number of gays and lesbians, goofing off at work, number of sociopaths, considering suicide, supporting civil liberties. They rank last in: believing in God, giving to charity, being true to oneself and others, number of hardcore racists, believing in "my country, right or wrong" and keeping their virginity till marriage.²³

In this last decade of the twentieth century there has been much research and discussion concerning the shape and importance of the family unit and its place in society. On May 19, 1992, Vice President Dan Quayle made a shocking statement regarding what he considered to be the normative American family. Apparently Quayle believed that the normative family is a traditional family (i.e., father, mother and 2.6 children). However, recent studies indicate that families in the 1990s are found in a variety of configurations including single parent families, blended families of divorced and remarried parents, families of one or two singles living together, nuclear and extended family groups, families of same sex parents (i.e., gay or lesbian), etc. One key to

²² Russell Chandler, "Californians: Spiritual But Not Conventional," Progressions [Lilly Endowment], January 1990: 8.

²³ Patterson and Kim, 21.

providing ministry to the culture of the 90s is to be able to address the many and changing needs of these family groups.²⁴

Of major importance to the Pacific Slope in the 1990s are the issues surrounding immigration and regional growth. The 1990 census figures show a variety of growth trends in California. Topping the list are the factors of births and immigrants, with another major factor being the increased longevity of the elderly.²⁵ With each of these groups come specific challenges and opportunities for both society and ministry.

Technology has a tremendous impact on the life of all Americans living in the 1990s. Technology may have an even greater impact for those living on the Pacific Slope. The scope of technology reaches from one's car (miniature computers, cellular phones, even fax machines) to one's bedroom (i.e. the development of a "smart home" with major functions being run by a central computer). Technology plays a roll in the very process of life itself, and with that role comes the increasing importance of the field of bioethics. A church seeking to minister to the needs of people living on the Pacific Slope will necessarily consider the role of technology in the lives of those people.

In regards to denominational ties between the local church and general church it is important to note that Disciples on the West WestCoast tend to feel the distance between themselves and Indianapolis. This is no doubt due in part to a general breakdown in our culture of nationally unified bodies in favor of more local and direct connection. But it is also in part due to the reality of the

²⁴ See Lawrence Kutner, "The New Family: Breaking the Stereotype of the Nuclear Family," Newsweek, 18 Nov. 1991: 518-19; and Anndee Hochman, "Family Matters," Oregonian [three-part series], 7 July 1991: L1, 10; 8 July 1991: D1, 8; 9 July 1991: D1-2.

²⁵ See Robert B. Gunnison, "California Population Rose 793,000 in 1990," San Francisco Chronicle, 8 May 1991: B1; and Tony Bizjak, "Seniors, Children Booming in Capital," Sacramento Bee, 10 May 1990: A1.

cultural strength of the Disciples in the midwest versus a relative weakness on the West Coast. If one attends a Disciples of Christ congregation in Kansas, one's friends are likely to understand what that means. That is not the case on the West Coast where Disciples make up a very small percentage of a very small church going population.

Related to this denominational concern is the political reality that many people on the West Coast may understand themselves in a closer relation to other countries of the Pacific Rim than to the mainstream United States. In general many people and governments of the world are feeling the need to develop a more globally oriented politic and economy. Gerald Mische has described this need in terms of a "megacrisis," stating that: "for many people of the world, the central issue is not nuclear disarmament, which is sometimes viewed as a First World agenda, but creating structures of human order which will allow all of humanity to live in dignity. We live in a world in which no human life can survive unless all of human life will survive."²⁶ People living in the culture of the Pacific Slope may understand this need better than other places in America because of their relationship to both Latin American and Asian countries. However, not all members of the dominant culture believe that interdependence is good. For example, note the popular penchant for Japan bashing which has often been in the news as of late.

There is a great concern in our modern culture for safety, law and order. We read and hear about drive-by shootings, hostage dramas, scandals by our elected and other leaders, and corrupt politicians. Out of fear for self and property many people on the West Coast live with bars on their windows or in

²⁶ Gerald F. Mische, "A Human World Order," Religious Education as Social Transformation, ed. Allen J. Moore (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1989), 93.

gated communities. Budget proposals for building new schools are defeated while referendums to build jails pass with an overwhelming majority.

In summary, the major issues and or problems that churches ministering to the Pacific Slope in the 1990s will need to address are: population and growth, transportation, racial and ethnic tensions (including the presence of many spiritual influences), living in a multi-cultural setting, ecological concerns (including distribution of resources and coping with natural disasters), the changing shape of the family and issues of sexuality as they relate to individuals and families, education (both private and public), bioethics, economics and politics on an international level, the impact of technology in daily life our lives, and law and order. In order for the church to minister to the culture of the 1990s, it will have to consider these and many other issues.

In a recent book by Lyle Schaller, the point is made that the world we live in is a different world than that of the 1950s. This is an important distinction for us to be aware of if we are to be successful at starting new congregations and ministering to the needs of the culture of the 1990s. The sad truth is that sometimes those of us in the mainline churches have forgotten it's truthfulness. At an Alban Institute conference in the fall of 1991, the keynoter Speed Leas made the observation that "mainline churches have taken the success stories of the 1950s and run them into the ground."²⁷ Without a clear understanding of the cultural climate in which we live and minister we are sure to fail. The insights of Schaller, Leas and others challenge mainline denominational leaders to be aware of the differences between the 1950s and the 1990s in order to be able to provide ministry to today's culture.

²⁷ Speed E. Leas, "Changing Congregational Systems," speech presented at conference sponsored by Alban Institute, San Mateo, Calif., 2 October 1991.

Why The Disciples?

It has been determined that with a clear mission statement and an understanding of the culture in which a congregation exists there is a good chance that the culture will be able to hear and receive the message of the Gospel. The Disciples of Christ have a particular ability and a unique opportunity to minister to the culture of the Pacific Slope in the 1990s because of an historical and theological emphasis of "unity within diversity." Disciples require no credal statement for church membership other than the "good confession of faith." Disciples claim to be accepting of a broad range of beliefs and practices, while still being united in Jesus Christ. This historical and theological tie is the basis of a clear mission statement for new Disciples congregations. When utilized in connection with an understanding of the diverse culture of the West Coast there is great possibility for ministry.

Conclusion

The methods of effectively sharing the gospel message with the world are determined by both the message (i.e., the gospel story) and the way in which the culture is available to receive that message. It is important for a church to be clear of its own mission. It is equally important for a church to understand the culture in which it seeks to minister so that it can effectively translate the gospel message. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has a unique and historic ability to accept a broad range of diversity within the body of Christ. This aspect of the Disciples' mission fits nicely with the diverse population of the Pacific Slope. Tex Sample (and others) have claimed that new churches have a particular opportunity and a good chance of meeting the needs of certain segments of the West Coast culture which are not being met in other

congregations (particularly cultural-left baby boomers).²⁸ Thus, new Disciples of Christ congregations have great potential for reaching the diverse culture of the Pacific Slope in the 1990s.

Yet the methods of doing ministry and our models for starting new congregations have not been significantly altered from those of the 1950s for most mainline denominations. In order to reach the diverse needs of the Pacific Slope culture of the 1990s the need is to develop some new models for “doing church.” Disciples need to come to a new understanding of what it means to be a congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) on the Pacific Slope. To be effective in meeting the needs of this culture, Disciples will need to develop some new models for starting new congregations on the Pacific Slope in the 1990s and beyond. The development of new models is the topic of the next chapter.

²⁸ Sample, 38.

For Further Discussion

1. What role does the Mission Statement play in the life of a congregation?

2. Does your congregation have a Mission Statement? What is it? How does it affect the ministry of your congregation?

3. What are the major sociological, economic and political issues in your region and town for the 1990s? How does your congregation's Mission Statement seek to address these needs?

4. What impact will the following have on the practice of ministry of your congregation in the next decade: ecology? concerns of families? population growth or decline? public and/or private education? technology? the regional and general manifestation of the denomination?

5. What is the mission of the Disciples of Christ for the next decade?

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CHAPTER 5

Some Successful Models of New Church

When a group begins the process of starting a new congregation, the question inevitably is asked, "Which method or model is the best for us to use?" The question appears to be simple enough, yet there is no single answer. In starting a new congregation a variety of methods have proven successful. Each denomination may make decisions regarding method based upon a variety of factors including theological preferences, denominational requirements, desire of local individuals, available finances, location, etc. Because each congregation is unique in its make up, the method used to start the new congregation will be unique as well. Some methods and models may be highly successful in certain situations and yet fail hopelessly in others. For this reason it would not make sense here to embrace a single model of new congregation establishment. Instead a variety of models must be explored in this discussion of starting new congregations.

This chapter explores a variety of models of congregational establishment beginning with the most recent and prevalent model used by mainline churches in the 1950s through 80s. Following that discussion is the examination of six models for starting new congregations (the judicatorial model, the entrepreneurial model, mothering, nesting, adoption and the multiple-staff model). Each model is followed by a brief analysis of that model's potential for use by Disciples. The models listed here are models which appear to hold the

most promise for Disciples on the Pacific Slope in the 1990s. They are models which have worked in past situations for a variety of denominations.

Of vital importance for any congregation (especially a new one) is the development of a sense of its unique mission and ministry in regards to its own location, members, community, and denomination through its mission statement. The models discussed below may or may not work for a specific situation, depending upon how well the model can fit the mission statement of the new congregation.

How Disciples and Other Mainline Protestants Start New Congregations

In his book on Strategies for New Churches, Ezra Earl Jones outlines the predominant method of starting new churches used by most mainline denominations throughout the 1970s and 1980s. According to this method, the idea for starting a new congregation begins at the judicatory (regional) level with a General Area Strategy. Target Areas for new church starts are identified and information is cultivated to determine the need for a new congregation in a specific area (i.e. a community survey or demographic study of the area is conducted). Sometimes the region will seek to purchase property in the area or develop a core group for the new congregation. Jones suggests that a Preliminary Mission Design is to be outlined and the type and ultimate size of the new congregation desired are to be decided at the inception of the process. At this point, an organizing Pastor (Pastor/Developer for Disciples) is called to work with the new congregation. Jones believes that this step may be the most important step because, as he writes, "selection of the right pastor is the single most important factor in the organization of a new congregation."¹ Finally,

¹ Ezra Earl Jones, Strategies for New Churches (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 109.

according to this model, funding is secured for the new church and the Sunday morning worship and other activities proceed according to plan.

This method is basically an adaptation of the model used successfully by most mainline denominations (including the Disciples of Christ) in the 1950s. However, this model met with limited success for most mainline denominations in the 1960s-1980s. There are several reasons for this.

In the first place, Jones' model makes some assumptions about the demographic makeup of growing areas which may have been true for the 1950s but which are not true for the 80s and 90s. In the 1950s the major rationale for starting new congregations was to incorporate a migrating population of Christians into the church. This was easily done because many of the new churches were located in newly developing suburbs and a large number of new residents to the new areas were already affiliated with a church. The purpose of the new congregations was to provide churches for a group of Christians who had migrated from the cities. According to Lester McAllister, Disciple church historian, "Disciples continued to grow during the 1950s by the momentum and interest of returning G. I.s and their families."² Today the cultural climate is quite different from the 1950s. The population of the 1990s is much more diverse religiously, ethnically and racially. Today's population continues to be highly mobile but in a different way than in the 1950s. Many of the residents to a new area do not have previous church affiliation.

Another problem with the Jones' model is that it depends upon two conditions: adherence to denominational guidelines (which can be rather bureaucratic) and the expenditure of some fairly large amounts of capital. In many cases it is not feasible or desirable for a judicatory to spend such a large

² McAllister, letter.

amount of time and money on each new congregation. If the venture of starting a new congregation is such a costly and time consuming affair, then the number of new church ventures is limited and the success of each new congregation is vitally important to the region involved. Heavy expectations are placed on all parties to make a go of it. Failure of an individual project is tantamount to defeat of the whole new church program. Such expectations are neither realistic nor healthy. Some new congregations, as any new venture of any sort, are doomed to failure. The conditions may not be right for starting a new congregation in a particular place at a given time. Demographic trends or forecasts may change more rapidly than expected. A particular Pastor/Developer may not be the right person for a given situation, even though his or her skills are superior in other areas. When so much weight is riding on a single venture and a region experiences failure, it is difficult to regain enough energy (and funding) to try again.³ In the 1990s, some different, less capital intensive models for starting new congregations may be necessary.

A third concern is that this model detracts from the autonomy and authority of the local congregation to make decisions for itself. Decisions about the new church regarding congregational size, type, mission, property and even pastor are decided before the new congregation is ever assembled. The new congregation has little input in any of these decisions. In a congregationally orientated denomination such as the Disciples of Christ this could be a particularly important block to success. Relatedly, this judicatory approach to starting new churches does not take into account the realization that a great number of new congregations in the 1980s and so far in the 1990s have been

³ These issues were first raised for me in a summer class at Pacific School of Religion, "New Kids Off the Old Block: New Church Development," July 1991. The professor for the class was Michael Nickerson, recent Director of Congregational Development for the Desert Southwest Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church in Phoenix, Arizona.

started by entrepreneurial individuals without the benefit of denominational support.⁴

In current Disciples polity and practice, the responsibility to start new congregations lies at the regional level. Regions continue to use primarily the Pastor/Developer model. The plan for starting a new congregation typically begins with a study of a target area, the selection and purchase of a site, and procedural steps for attracting and officially “recognizing” a core group of participants. Once these steps have been completed, a steering committee is organized which moves to call a Pastor/Developer. At this point plans are made to develop a Mission Statement and Goals for the new congregation. Later, after much time and money has already been invested, worship begins in the new congregation. This model is highly capital intensive for a region, in some cases costing up to \$400,000 or more over the course of a few years.⁵ The emphasis is on adherence to denominational and procedural guidelines and financing of the new venture. Financial and procedural concerns are necessary to a new church venture, but to what extent and at what point in the process? One question this approach raises is what kind of persons will be attracted to this new church? The answer is probably not what we would hope or plan for in a new church. A heavily bureaucratized method will tend to attract those who are already familiar with and appreciative of the current church organizational system. If, however, our major intent is to reach the unchurched it would seem necessary to try a different approach.

According to a questionnaire analysis of the 1980s CAN program, the focus

⁴ Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters, 12.

⁵ Letter from James M. Smith, Area Minister/President of the Tres Rios Area of the Southwest Region, to James L. Powell, Director of New Congregation Establishment, 13 February 1990. In that letter Smith wrote regarding the West Mesa Christian Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Smith approximates that the start up cost of that new congregation was \$453,900.00.

of new church starts in the 1980s was in suburban (56.2 percent), growing (81.1 percent) areas, however significant attempts were made at starting new congregations among ethnic/minority groups. (twenty-seven percent of the new congregations were either Afro-American, Hispanic, or Asian). Thirty-two percent of the new pastors were in their 30s while another thirty percent were in their 50s age-wise. Sixty-five percent of the new church starts were initiated by regions or areas. The average number of months until formal worship began (among the 63 percent of the projects that did not begin formal worship at start-up) was 4.8 months. The average attendance in the beginning month of formal worship was 31. In that report, no mention was made of the use of alternative models, except that new models are being explored, and, hopefully, will be used in the future. Neither was any mention made of a model involving more than one paid staff person in a new church start.⁶ This report shows the heavy reliance of regions on the pastor/developer model of starting new congregations.

Chapter 3 of the New Congregation Establishment Handbook for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) holds up ten different models for starting new churches, including models for establishing racial and ethnic congregations.⁷ Each model listed has certain advantages and disadvantages. The multiplicity of models (and variations thereof) would suggest that there is not an absolute or commonly preferred model for starting new congregations among the Disciples, and that each situation should be seen as unique. However, according to the Director of New Congregation

⁶ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Board of Church Extension and Division of Homeland Ministries, CAN Evaluation Report: 1980's Church Advance Now Program (Indianapolis: Board of Church Extension, 1989), 2-6.

⁷ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), New Congregation Establishment, 8-9.

Establishment for the Board of Church Extension, the denominational emphasis for the 1990s will be in three areas: (1) the recruitment, selection and training of Pastor Developers to begin these new congregations; (2) identification of the best potential places for new Disciples of Christ congregations; and (3) early purchase of land.⁸ These emphases suggest an overall adherence to the model as outlined by Jones. And yet, in order for Disciples to be successful at starting new congregations in the 1990s, we cannot rely solely on this model.

Some Other Models

In this section models other than the judicatory approach to new church starts are examined. The primary focus of this section is a review of some models for starting new congregations. This section does not focus on the particular message of evangelism for Disciples. Some of the following methods have been developed in accordance with a theology of church and evangelism that is different from the normative Disciples theology of acceptance within diversity (see Chapter 3). Some, or perhaps a combination of these techniques, may be helpful for Disciples in the 1990s, depending upon the specifics of a given situation. It is vitally important to be true to one's own denominational heritage when going about the business of starting new congregations. Disciples have a particular interpretation of the gospel message that is different from the message of the Assemblies of God, Presbyterians, etc. If Disciples are to be successful at starting new Disciples congregations in the 1990s, they must continue to be true to the Disciples understanding of the gospel message.

In his book, 44 Questions for Church Planters, Lyle Schaller lists three basic

⁸ Deborah R. Thompson, "New Congregation Establishment Director Gears Up for the 1990s," BCE Extension 7, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 1.

choices for increasing the number of churches of a denomination: (1) adopt non-affiliated congregations, (2) split churches, and (3) plant new churches using any one of a variety of methods.⁹ According to Schaller every method of starting new congregations can be seen as a variation on one or more of these choices. Schaller defines the "three [most] crucial variables" in starting new congregations as: (1) the first pastor, (2) the vision of the new church, and (3) [creative] leadership at the denominational and/or host congregational level.¹⁰ He urges denominational leaders to take seriously the fact that "the majority of new Protestant churches started in the United States during the 1980s were launched by ministers and lay leaders not related to any denominational agency."¹¹

One approach to understanding different models of new congregation development is an historic approach. Mainline denominations currently utilize the model of starting new congregations from the 1950s because it was successful. But this is not the only possible method to use. There have been other moments in history when other methods of starting new congregations were just as successful. In a study exploring Protestant churches in upstate New York (c. 1810), Michael G. Nickerson discovered that each denomination started new churches according to their own particular denominational polity and theology: the Methodists sent Circuit Riders, the Baptists had church splits, and Episcopal priests were commissioned by the Bishop at the request of Episcopalians living in a new area.¹² Disciples in the 1990s need an

⁹ Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters, 26.

¹⁰ Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters, 37-45.

¹¹ Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters, 12.

¹² Class notes, Pacific School of Religion, July 22, 1991.

understanding of the Disciples heritage of starting new congregations prior to the 1950s. From such an understanding, the Disciples of Christ can gain helpful insights for sharing their understanding of the Gospel message by starting new congregations!

Chapter 2 of this project shows that Disciples on the West Coast utilized at least five methods of starting new congregations. Churches were started by pioneers who needed to share in fellowship with like minded people and who had an evangelistic zeal. They were started through congregational splits. Traveling evangelists, or state evangelists effectively started a number of new congregations on the West Coast in the early years. Mother congregations also helped get new churches going. In the latter part of the twentieth century the majority of new churches have had denominational sponsorship. All of these methods have been effective for Disciples to some degree or another. In the future Disciples will, no doubt, employ similar methods and adapt or utilize methods from other denominations in the task of starting congregations on the West Coast. Below is a listing of some potential models for Disciples in the 1990s. Each model is followed by an evaluation of some of the potential and/or perils of this model and its use by Disciples.

1. Tentmakers. Some methods of starting new congregations require very little financial and/or bureaucratic support. Such ventures are "personnel intensive" rather than "capital intensive."¹³ In the personnel intensive model, a pastor is sent (or called) to a new church location and is given little or no resources with which to start a congregation. Oftentimes the pastor will have to work at another job or receive some other source of income in order to support him/herself until the church is large enough to provide a salary. The success or

¹³ Class notes, Pacific School of Religion, July 24, 1991.

failure of this model rests on the shoulders of the pastor. Historically many Disciples churches were started in this fashion. It is foreseeable that such “tentmaking ministries” will also be an effective way for Disciples to start new congregations. However, there are some problems with this model as well.

For the Disciples of Christ, certain theological and practical obstacles are inherent in this method of new church establishment. One of the major historic struggles for Disciples as a denomination has centered around congregational independence vs. denominational connectedness. Disciples congregations are linked by a covenantal relationship. Each congregation is autonomous in making decisions regarding mission statement, staffing, outreach, financing, etc. The regional and general manifestations of the church are also autonomous in that a decision made at General Assembly is not necessarily binding on a region or local congregation. Disciples are, however, linked through a common history and share similar faith practice. Because of their openness and acceptance of diversity, Disciples have at times experienced confusion of identity. From time to time a charismatic leader has taken advantage of the openness of the Disciples and has divided a congregation or region to his or her own benefit. Disciples continuously struggle, with this issue on both the practical and ideological level. Because of that struggle, most regions would prefer not to encourage this independent method of starting new churches, and yet there may be instances for which it is most appropriate.

2. Mothering. During the 1970s and 80s, a number of smaller denominations and independent churches effectively utilized another method of starting new congregations called “Mothering” (or “Church Parenting”)¹⁴ Mothering involves the commissioning of a group from one congregation to

¹⁴ Dean Merrill, “Mothering a New Church,” Leadership 6, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 98-99.

break off and become the nucleus for a new congregation meeting in another place. This method has been well received by the leaders of congregations who have “mothered” a church. In a 1985 poll by Leadership magazine, out of 84 respondents who had “mothered” a new congregation, only fifteen percent of those would NOT do it again. Twenty-one percent of the 84 respondents said that the “mothering church” was somewhat depleted, but most of them noted that it was only for a limited time. One pastor who has been involved in the church mothering process says that

mothering is a concept for extending God's kingdom that carries with it a number of side benefits: it provides the critical mass to make a Sunday meeting workable from the beginning, it offsets the loneliness that has buffeted many a pioneer pastor, it includes the availability of wise counsel as well as financial undergirding, and it can even revitalize the aging mother. Such a combination is certainly worth the attention and study of local church leaders.¹⁵

The model of church mothering has some interesting implications for Disciples. According to current practice, the responsibility lies largely the regions to establish new congregations. However, a modified form of church mothering is often commonly practiced when a new congregation is started. Historically, new Disciples congregations have often received a large share of charter members from another church in the area. The problem that Disciples congregations will likely experience today when faced with the opportunity to mother a new church is the fear of losing too many members to the new congregation. Many Disciples congregations feel that they are not strong enough to let go of a large number of members all at once. This feeling is unfortunate and may keep churches from trying mothering as an option for starting new congregations among Disciples.

3. Nesting. Nesting is another approach to church planting and is similar to

¹⁵ Merrill, 104.

mothering. The concept of nesting has already been used quite successfully with ethnic/minority congregations among the Disciples of Christ.¹⁶ In the nesting model, an existing congregation allows a new congregation to form within the church facilities. The new congregation maintains its own identity via its own leadership, board, mission statement, etc. The new congregation may or may not move out of the nesting facilities in which it was formed. By allowing a new church to nest within its walls, the existing church gains the life and benefits of housing a new congregation. By housing itself within the walls of an existing church building the new congregation is spared some of the start up expense of a new venture. West Coast Disciples may find the nesting model to be a very helpful model for starting new congregations in the 1990s! It is a model which should be explored deeper by both regions and local congregations.

4. Adoption. Adoption is a model that deserves further exploration by Disciples. In this model an existing but non-affiliated congregation is adopted into the denominational framework and becomes a participating member of the region through regional ties and Basic Mission Finance contributions. This model has also already been quite effective in developing ethnic and minority congregations to the Disciples of Christ. A word of caution needs to be offered about this approach, however.

Existing congregations already have some historical and theological ties because of their prior life. If those ties do not fit with the Disciples theology and practice of unity within diversity, it would be wise for the region to question the desire for adoption on the part of the congregation. The congregation being

¹⁶ Nesting is so popular among such groups that I cannot remember where I first learned about it. For more information on this type of church, contact the Wilshire Christian Church, Los Angeles, California, where a modified form of nesting has been utilized with some success.

adopted needs to hold allegiance to the mission and ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) if its inclusion in the denomination is to be a true adoption.

5. Multi-staff. Another approach which may prove to be effective for the Disciples in the 1990s is that of planting a multi-staffed congregation. In his book on starting new churches, Lyle Schaller writes: "Many specialists in church planting conclude that the most effective, and frequently in the long run the lowest cost approach, is to begin with a team of two to seven people [on the staff of the new congregation]."¹⁷ Schaller's experience leads him to believe that:

while exceptions always exist, the basic pattern tends to be that the larger the staff: (a) the bigger the crowd at that first service, (b) the earlier the new mission becomes self-supporting, (c) the smaller the total subsidy (exclusive of subsidies from employed spouses), and (d) the younger the median age of the membership eighteen months later.¹⁸

This understanding would advocate for sending a large staff to start a new venture. According to Schaller, the design behind such an approach is to

send a team of three-to-seven full-time and/or part-time persons in to organize what from day one is designed to be a large congregation. In effect, the goal is to create a large multiple-staff church that will be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating by month twelve.¹⁹

Such an approach requires a radical shift in thinking for Disciples. We are accustomed to thinking that starting a new church means starting small and growing slowly. In addition, most of our existing congregations are not this kind of large, multi-staff churches so we do not think in terms of starting new ones in

¹⁷ Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters, 71.

¹⁸ Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters, 73.

¹⁹ Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters, 111.

this way. If Disciples can get beyond their current way of thinking, the multiple staff model could be very effective (theologically, practically and costwise) for West Coast Disciples in the 1990s.

There are a variety of other models that Disciples of Christ could choose from in order to meet the goal of starting new congregations in the 1990s. With some creative and adaptive leadership, these models will indeed be effectively utilized by the Disciples of Christ in this great task which is ours.

Conclusion.

For Disciples, an open and accepting understanding of the gospel message is as important as the method used to start new congregations. According to the New Church Handbook published by the Board of Church Extension, the main purpose of starting new congregations in the 1990s is to reach the unchurched. A secondary evangelistic purpose is to maintain a Disciples presence and witness in the world. A variety of models ought to be used in starting new congregations in so far as they are appropriate to a Disciples understanding of theology and church polity. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has a particular understanding of the Gospel message, and in order to share that message with the world the Disciples need to be clear about who they are and what they are about as Disciples of Christ.

The current model of new congregation establishment, based on the successes of the 1950s (i.e., the Pastor/Developer model), has been effectively used in a number of instances. However, it has met with difficulty in some areas and is by no means the only appropriate model for Disciples in the 1990s. If the Disciples of Christ are to succeed at the task of starting such a large number of new congregations on the West Coast, they will have to develop and adapt a variety of models. From a study of Disciples history, one can find a variety of

models historically used in the task of starting new congregations. Disciples can utilize methods and techniques that have been successful for others also, including non-mainline denominations. The six models outlined above have promising possibilities for the future of Disciples of Christ on the West Coast. What Disciples need now are some creative leaders (lay and clergy) who will seek to explore and put into action these models. The next chapter will address the challenge of recruiting and training such leaders.

For Further Discussion

1. What model was used to start the congregation in which you now worship? Who were the leaders of that venture? In what ways were they creative about starting that church?

2. Discuss the pro's and con's of each of the models explained in this chapter. Which one (or ones) interest you the most? Why?

3. If you were going to start a new church, which model(s) would you use? Why? How would you adapt that model to fit your situation?

Resources

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CHAPTER 6

Developing Leaders for Planting New Churches

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.

--Theodore Roosevelt ¹

In this project, the process of establishing new Disciples of Christ congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s has been addressed. The need for these new congregations has been established by the general church in regard to the priority of starting 200 new congregations nationwide in the 1990s (General Assembly Resolution #8763). The scope of that need for the West Coast has been clearly defined through demographic studies which indicate that ninety out of 270 key target areas for new Disciple congregations in the 1990s are in West Coast regions. The potential for establishing a large number of new Disciples congregations on the Pacific Slope in the 1990s makes this priority possible due to the large percentage of unchurched persons within the

¹ Executive Speechwriter Newsletter [St. Johnsbury, Vt.], sample issue, 1992, 5.

population of these states. The need is great and the potential exists for the fulfillment of this priority. But is the task too large? Is it possible to start a significant number of Disciples of Christ congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s? Given the success rate of recent new church establishment programs, factoring in the high cost models used most widely by Disciples, and in conjunction with the apparent theological loss of a mandate for evangelism, fulfillment of the priority to start new congregations would seem an impossibility.

The thesis of this project is, however, that fulfillment of the priority to establish a large number of Disciples congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s is possible. A study of how congregations were historically established by Disciples on the West Coast (Chapter 2 of this project) reveals that Disciples once had an understanding of themselves which included starting new congregations as second nature. Key to this understanding were leaders who were able to translate the unique Disciple understanding of the Gospel message to the culture in which they lived. These leaders were ambitious and creative, able to develop or adapt models of starting new churches to meet the needs of their situation. By reclaiming that historic commitment to starting new congregations, and by developing a clear and appropriate theology of evangelism for the Disciples of Christ, Disciple leaders of today will be capable of developing and utilizing a variety of models for starting new Disciples congregations on the West Coast. It is clear that the responsibility for fulfillment of this objective does not wholly depend upon the right strategies, the right theology or the right amount of funds. The responsibility for fulfillment of this priority, and the potential for success or failure, lies with creative and ambitious leaders who are able and willing to rise to the task. This chapter deals with the importance of leadership in the task of starting new churches.

Leadership is Key

In any business venture, success or failure ultimately falls upon the shoulders of the leader(s). The leaders are the ones who are entrusted with the mission of the new venture. They are the ones responsible for carrying out the goals and objectives. They are the ones who bring a new venture to life. The mission (or vision) of the organization must come first, but leadership is key to making that happen.

In his book, Managing the Non-Profit Organization, Peter F. Drucker relates that "the task of the non-profit manager is to try to convert the organization's mission statement into specifics."² It is the task of the manager (i.e., the leadership) to provide the specifics of the vision for an organization. Involved in this task is the balancing of the long range goals and the short range needs of the institution. Also involved is the ability to articulate the mission and communicate clearly the needs of the organization.³

A church is a non-profit organization, and what has been stated above regarding the leadership of other non-profit organizations is also true for churches, even more so for a new church venture. Experts in the field of new church establishment have for a long time proposed that leadership is one of the most (if not the most) crucial factor in starting new congregations. Ezra Earl Jones believes that the selection of the right pastor is the single most important factor in the organization of a new congregation.⁴ In his book 44 Questions for Church Planters, Lyle Schaller defines the "three [most] crucial variables" in

² Peter F. Drucker, Managing the Non-Profit Organization (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 5.

³ Drucker, 23 - 27, 45 - 49.

⁴ Jones, Strategies, 109.

starting new congregations as: (1) the first pastor, (2) the vision of the new church, and (3) [creative] leadership at the denominational and/or host congregational level.⁵ In starting a new congregation strong leadership can and must come from both lay people and clergy. The role of denominational leadership is vitally important, as is the input from local lay persons interested in this new venture. The importance of leadership in a new church venture cannot be underestimated.

The search for competent leaders in the changing times of the 1990s, is a major concern for nearly every aspect of the culture in which we live. From the corporate board room to the seminary classroom, from the oval office to the church office, leadership is crucial. Many books and articles have been written about leadership in both the corporate and public service sectors of our culture. Some of that work has been adapted for use in the church, which naturally raises the question of the appropriateness of secular approaches for the church. What are the qualities of effective and faithful church leaders? What methods of leadership are appropriate for leaders in the church? Of those methods, which are most crucial for the leaders of a new congregation?

The term leadership is usually accompanied by words such as risk, creativity and vision. Effective leaders are willing to take risks. They are creative in their approach to problem solving. They must have a clear vision and can encourage people to follow their leadership. However, these qualities alone are not enough for leaders of the church. In addition, church leaders must possess and display a depth of faith in God. It is not enough for a church leader to have charisma, s/he must also have a commitment to the higher calling of the Christian faith.

⁵ Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters, 37-45.

In his book, Leaders for Such a Time as This, Peter M. Morgan develops the concept of the transforming leader. The term is borrowed from James McGregor Burns (Leadership), and is focused and redefined by Morgan for the needs of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the decade of the 1990s.⁶ According to Morgan, transforming [church] leaders share at least five characteristics:

1. Transforming leaders are called to a specific context. Their leadership is effective in a certain time and place, under a specific set of circumstances.⁷ In this regard, the transforming leader is more than merely a manager. S/he uses the skills of leadership to fulfill a specifically Christian vision in a specific time and place.
2. Transforming leaders are empowered with special powers, and are understood to have special authority which validates their leadership. The power and authority of the transforming church leader, however, is not sought for themselves, rather it is a power which comes from, and is directed toward the higher authority of Jesus Christ. In this regard Morgan writes, "The gospel is the power. The scripture is the authority."⁸
3. Transforming leaders are informed by, and re-tell the stories of the Christian faith found in the Bible. Transforming leaders continuously engage the biblical texts which "keep transforming the church."⁹ Such leaders engage the church in theological dialogue and are "aware of the place of today's church

⁶ Peter M. Morgan, Leaders for Such a Time as This: Biblical Reflections on Transformation (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1990), 12.

⁷ Morgan, 7.

⁸ Morgan, 18.

⁹ Morgan, 22.

in the great scope of God's acting in history."¹⁰

4. Transforming leaders are persons of faith. They are able to move freely between the public work of being a leader, and the deeply private discipline of prayer. From their private devotional and prayer life comes the transforming leader's God given vision for the church. As Morgan poetically puts it, "In that womb of prayer, character is molded, vision is formed, mission is conceived."¹¹ Inherent in this characteristic are the ideals of "calling," "vocation," and "commitment to the cause of Christ."¹²

5. Transforming leaders are able to "get the job done."¹³ They are able to develop and use tools necessary for the task at hand. They are able to empower others toward fulfillment of the vision. Relationships are a key ingredient to this characteristic of the transforming leader -- "relationship of the leader to the gospel, relationship of the leader within the community of leaders, and finally relationship of the leader to the followers."¹⁴

These qualities of the transforming leader are vitally important for the church if it is to meet the spiritual needs of a changing world. The transforming leader is needed in today's church, just as s/he was needed in the church of the New Testament. In a new church venture the qualities of a transforming leader may even be more critical than in an established congregation.

In an established church, some of the essential programs may have a life of their own. The women's organization, the Elders' duties, the day-to-day and

¹⁰ Morgan, 31.

¹¹ Morgan, 28-29.

¹² Morgan, 29.

¹³ Morgan, 36.

¹⁴ Morgan, 34.

month-to-month operation of the physical plant may need little attention from the pastor or other key leaders. In a healthy church the vision may have been so clearly stated in the past, and the stories of faith may be so well inculcated into the life of the congregation, that there is little need for the leadership to do more than make passing reference to them. An established congregation can survive (perhaps even thrive) under managerial-type leadership.

In a new church, however, nothing can be taken for granted. In a new church tasks will not get done automatically. Something that may have worked in another situation and at another time may not be appropriate for the situation of the new congregation. In a new church the vision may only be clear, at first, to one or two individuals. There is little history in a new congregation, so the transformational leader will need to identify and articulate stories from daily congregational life which will help focus and define the vision. Issues of power and authority can sprout quickly where there is a void of leadership. In a new church, the transformational leader would be responsible for directing that power and authority to Christ. The transformational leadership of the new congregation will need to develop skills and utilize tools necessary to get the job done. In a new church the role of transformational leadership is an essential key to success.

Leadership Training

Up to this point, this project has been concerned with the task of defending the thesis that starting a significant number of new Disciples of Christ congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s is possible with the proper tools. The preceding chapters have developed the arguments necessary for the accomplishment of this thesis. It has been determined that the important ingredients are: a clear and appropriate theology of evangelism, the

development of a clear understanding of mission, an understanding of the culture in which one lives, and leadership. The work presented here, however, is merely a starting point. The thesis of this project raises, in a general way, the issues which will need to be addressed in a more specific way for each particular context. It is the role of the leadership (at the general, regional and local levels, both lay and clergy) to bring these elements together in such a way as to make the vision of a new congregation a reality. Each chapter of this project has included questions and resources for congregational leaders, in the hope that they will study the issues and opportunities for themselves, and relate them to their own situation. In the last part of this chapter, a process is outlined which will enable West Coast regions to develop leaders who will fulfill the goal of starting new congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s.

Leaders can utilize the findings of this project (both the findings of the author and the findings of those leaders who will study and discuss the questions at the end of each chapter) in the process of starting a new congregation. At this point, the findings from the first five chapters of this study are brought together in order to aid in the development of leaders. The hope is that the leadership of new congregations will be equipped with an appropriate Disciples theology of evangelism and new church development, an eagerness to start new congregations, a knowledge of the relationship between the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the culture of the Pacific Slope, and a willingness to explore and adapt new models for starting new congregations.

Included below is an outline for a conference on starting new churches among the Disciples of Christ. The purpose of the conference is to begin planting the seeds for starting new congregations among West Coast Disciples. Both this chapter, and the conference, will help to develop, educate and cultivate leaders for the task of starting new Disciples of Christ congregations on

the West Coast in the 1990s.

A prototype conference was presented to the Northern California region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in January of 1993. The conference was sponsored by the joint Church Development Committee of the Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ in Northern California-Nevada. The leaders of this conference came from local, regional and general church personnel. The conference was attended by both lay and clergy persons interested in the possibilities of starting new congregations. The conference will be made available to other regions on the Pacific Slope as well.

Regional and general church leaders interested in establishing new congregations on the Pacific Slope in the 1990s will face a number of challenges. Realities (or perceptions) exist which add to the difficulty of the task. Leaders will need to develop a sensitivity to these realities in order to fulfill the goal of starting a significant number of new congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s. Some of these realities (or perceptions) include the following issues:

1. Mainline denominations have had limited success at starting new congregations for the last 30 years. We've simply forgotten how to do it. This may make the task difficult for leaders to garner financial and emotional support for starting new congregations today.

2. Church growth expert, Lyle Schaller, indicates that most of the new churches started in the 1970s and 80s were started by individuals with an entrepreneurial spirit. He urges denominational leaders to take seriously the fact that "the majority of new Protestant churches started in the United States during the 1980s were launched by ministers and lay leaders not related to any

denominational agency."¹⁵ The difficulty facing regional and general church leaders is to attract and train such leaders without causing them to lose the maverick spirit that is so desperately needed for this task.

3. The mainline seminaries of today primarily train persons to be pastoral overseers of existing congregations. Little, if anything, is done to encourage seminarians to develop the kind of ambitious spirit needed to start new congregations. If the goal is to be reached, seminaries will have to include this kind of training in some way.

4. Money continues to be an important stumbling block to starting new congregations, no matter which model is chosen or developed. Leaders dedicated to the task will need to develop creative means of financing new ventures.

What then is needed to fulfill the goal of establishing a significant number of Disciples congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s? If the leadership of the local, regional and general church is to reach this goal, several things will have to happen: Local and regional leadership will have to take the priority seriously and share a vision of that goal with others; they will need to begin planting the seeds of possibility so that others will grasp that vision; they will need to develop a process of education for those who will be entrusted with the vision; and they will have to encourage boldness and creativity among the leadership.

Conference Outline

New Church Development Conference (A Prototype)
January 22-23, 1993

¹⁵ Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters, 12

**Monte Toyon Conference Center
Aptos, California**

Sponsored by the joint Committee on Church Development of The United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Northern California and Nevada.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this conference was to educate church leaders to the opportunities, needs and obstacles of starting new churches in Northern California, with the intent of developing leaders who have a vision for starting new congregations in the 1990s.

GOALS:

1. The primary goal of this conference was to plant the seeds of new church establishment among lay and clergy leaders of the region/conference and local congregations. (To share the motivation for starting new churches, to help leaders catch a vision of starting new churches and to encourage leaders to find creative ways of starting congregations in their particular situation.)
2. A secondary goal was to provide education (historical & practical) on the ways in which new churches are established.
3. A third goal was to create dialogue in order to expand participants' knowledge of evangelism and new church establishment (especially in Northern California).

Conference Publicity was targeted toward:

1. Congregations currently in care with the Church Development Committee.
2. Potential "Mother" congregations (i.e., the REAL leaders).

3. Seminary students and professors.
4. Others interested in new church establishment (general publicity).

COST: \$50.00 per person. \$37.00 per person for Church Development Committee members.

General Office Participants: Deborah Thompson with the Office of Church Development at the Board of Church Extension of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was the main speaker on Friday evening. Dr. Guen Hee Yu (Department of American-Asian Ministries) with the Division of Homeland Ministries for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was one of the presenters on Saturday morning.

Conference Schedule:

Friday -

- 2:00 - Committee members met and reviewed conference details.
- 5:00 - Arrival and Registration
- 6:00 - Dinner
- 7:00 - Session I: "NORTHERN CALIFORNIA -- A NEW CHURCH VISION FOR THE 90s."
 Introductions and Getting Acquainted. Emphasize the purpose of this event -- Focus on the fact that leadership is the key to the success of starting new churches -- "Therefore, YOU are essential!"
 Worship
 Singing
 Prayer
 Scripture Reading
 Sermon
 Deborah Thompson
 [The purpose of this time was to give the participants a call to the mission and allow them to share the vision of starting new congregations. The Committee asked Deborah to include "This is what motivates me to do this task." "The scope of the task (briefly)." "Ask the question, 'What motivates you?'"¹⁶]
- 8:15- Directed Quiet time for self reflection.(1-2 min.)

¹⁶ See Appendix D for the Church Development Committee's notes to Deborah Thompson regarding the Friday evening message, and the written text of that message.

Time for small group reflection and sharing
 A time of offering our reflections and dreams. "What's your vision
 for new churches?"
 Closing Hymn
 Benediction

Saturday-

8:00 - Breakfast
 9:00 - Worship (song and prayer)
 9:15 - Session II -- "WE'VE GOT A VISION, BUT HOW WILL WE EVER
 BE ABLE TO DO IT ALL?"

Introduction & setting ground rules for this session.

Panel Discussion-- Sharing by six (6) individuals who are involved with successful, recent new church starts. The purpose of this session was to inform the participants of models for starting new congregations which have been used in Northern California, how those models function, and to what degree of success. The intent was for the participants to begin to realize "some truths about starting new churches in the 1990s," so that they can utilize these models and truths for their own situation. Each panel participant had 10 minutes (strictly enforced!!!!) to give a snapshot of how their new congregation was formed.

They were asked to focus on topics such as: theology, sources of funding, involvement of lay & clergy leaders, importance of the Mission Statement (i.e., vision), target area, audience, use of demographic research, etc.

The people on this panel include:

- Dr. Guen Hee Yu, Director of American-Asian Ministries with the Division of Homeland Ministries of the General Office of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
- Rev. William Cummings, Bear Creek Community Church (American Baptist), Stockton, California. (A suburban, middle class, predominantly anglo congregation which utilized a large church start approach.)
- Rev. Lorenzo Carlisle, Oakland Community Church, United Church of Christ, Oakland, California. (A black congregation in inner city Oakland with a vision of justice.)
- Rev. Erasto Arenas, First Philippino American Congregation, United Church of Christ, San Bruno, California. (A new church with the vision of starting many others.)
- Rev. Bill Hutchinson, New Hope Church, United Church of Christ, Sonoma, California. (A peace with justice congregation.)
- Rev. Ron Frazier, First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Stockton, California. (A relocation of a congregation from a dying, inner city setting to a suburban setting.)

The two overarching themes that appeared in this session from the presenters were: (1) the importance of the leadership having a clear and strong vision; and (2) the creativity of the leadership to bring that vision to life.

10:30 - Break

10:45 - Session III - "WE'RE GOING TO THE NEW CHURCH FAIR"

Tables were set up around the room and each presenter had space to show pictures, hand out literature, share stories of what worked, what didn't, and why. Participants were encouraged to travel from table to table asking questions, getting hints, help, etc.

Noon - Lunch

1:30 - Session IV - "WHERE DO WE START?"

The purpose of this session was to provide resources for persons in local congregations who will be leaders of new congregations. The session was designed to help answer the questions: "What can I as a local church member do?" "What resources are available?" "What can I do now/today that will keep me from going home and doing nothing?" Small groups resumed as per Friday evening. Participants went through a process of evaluating their own interests and possibilities for starting a new congregation. They then developed a covenant with the group as to how they would follow up on this event (go home and pray, go start a new church tomorrow, etc.). Each person was then given an envelope in which to enclose their covenant. These were taken and mailed to the participants two weeks later.

Questions asked of the groups at this time were:

- 1) Share with each other your enthusiasm for new church establishment in Northern California now that you have participated in this conference. Has your vision changed? How? Has it grown? In what way?
- 2). What important issues, attitudes, or principles need to be on the list for the Church Development Committee? What needs do you have in this area?
- 3) What would help you from here? What is your next step, and how can we help you get there?
- 4) Please make a covenant with the members of your group as to how you will follow up on this event. You will be given an envelope to address and in which to enclose your covenant. It will be mailed to you in two weeks.

During this time evaluations of the event were also filled out and returned to the committee (see appendix D for full evaluation response).

3:00 - Closing Worship and commissioning service.

Song.

Laying on of hands.

Benediction.

Conference Report

On Friday and Saturday, January 22-23, 1993, a New Church Development Conference was held at Monte Toyon Conference Center in Aptos, California. This event was a prototype conference and is intended to be adapted for use in other West Coast regions.

The purpose of the event was to educate church leaders about the opportunities, needs and obstacles of starting new churches in Northern California, with the intent of developing leaders who have a vision for starting new congregations in the 1990s. The intent of the conference was to plant the seeds of possibility in the minds of those who will be leaders in the area of new church establishment in this decade. Following is an evaluation of that event. (For a compilation of all evaluation responses see Appendix D.)

Fifty-two persons were in attendance at the conference, either part time or full time. Participants included presenters, Church Development Committee members, seminary students, and local congregational leadership (both lay and clergy). The event was jointly sponsored by the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ. Two of the presenters were from the general office of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Indianapolis. Others were from local congregations of the United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ and the American Baptist denominations. Both the Disciples Regional Minister and President and the U.C.C. Conference Minister were present at the event. Attendance was fairly evenly split between the two groups. Ratio of men to women was about even.

In general the event was a success. The planning committee felt that an attendance of thirty would be a positive sign. The maximum number allowed by site restrictions was sixty, so fifty-two persons in attendance was considered to be very good. Participants were involved in general group sessions, which

were directed toward creating and sharing the vision of starting a significant number of new congregations in Northern California in the 1990s. Participants were also able to hear stories from, and talk directly to, individuals who have had success at starting new congregations in Northern California in recent years. In addition, participants were led through a process of evaluating their own situation and their desire to be involved in the process of starting a new church. The committee followed up this event with direct mailings to participants, phone contacts, personal contacts, and direct services of the Church Development Committee.

Following the event, at least two groups of persons expressed interest in the possibility of starting a new congregation in their geographic area. It is within the realm of possibility that the region of Northern California will be able to have two new churches established by 1994 as a direct result of this event.

The overwhelming response was to sponsor another event like this in the future. Participants seemed to get the most out of: (1) Deborah Thompson's visioning sermon, and (2) the real life stories from those who have done it. Regarding the length of the event, participants suggested that we: (1) offer an extended overnight event, giving more time for each presenter to share the particulars of their story, or (2) offer a one day workshop for a specific geographic area.

Conclusion

The key to the success of starting a new congregation lies in the potential of the leaders (both lay and clergy) to create a vision of the new church, and in their ability to bring that vision to life. In doing so, it is important for the leadership to have a clear theology of evangelism, a comprehension of the needs of the community in which the new congregation will minister, a strategy

for implementing the mission of the new congregation within the context of that community, and appropriate models for implementing the vision. The role of the leader is to bring the resources, vision and knowledge of the new church together in such a way as to accomplish the task of creating a new church. Without creative and energetic leaders, the implementation of the goal to establish a significant number of new congregations on the West Coast in the 1990s is not possible.

In response to the need for educated, energetic leaders, the joint Church Development Committee of the Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ in Northern California-Nevada held a workshop in January of 1993. The purpose of the conference was to plant seeds of possibility among potential and current leaders. The conference was a success in both attendance and in fulfilling its purpose. It is hoped that the conference will become a prototype for similar conferences to be held in other West Coast regions.

For Further Discussion

1. In your opinion, what role does the leader play in the establishment of a new congregation? Can you identify some individuals in your congregation who would be able to provide that kind of leadership? In your region? Have you ever approached him or her with the possibility of starting a new church?
2. Can you identify some leaders who have successfully started new congregations in your region? What is their theological background? How does it fit with Disciple theology? What can you learn from them?
3. What is your vision of a new church? How are you willing and able to commit yourself to that vision?

Resources

Callahan, Kennon L. Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990.

Edwards, William H., ed. Igniting the Flames of Commitment and Witness: A Handbook on Congregational Empowerment. Indianapolis: Division of Homeland Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 1990.

Hobgood, W. Chris. Organizing for Mission and Ministry: Congregational Program Planning Manual. St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1991.

Morgan, Peter M. Leaders for Such a Time as This: Biblical Reflections on Transformation. St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1990.

Also, contact the Church Development Committee for the church establishment guidelines of your region.

Appendix A

West Coast Yearbook Statistics from 1909-1912

Year Reported	Calif. North	Calif. South	Oregon	Wash. East	Wash. West
1909 - A	1,900,000	800,000	600,000	400,000	640,500
B	93	67	106	52	47
C	2	3	9	3	
D	100	61	109	100 (Wash.	total)
1910 - A	1,900,000	950,000	650,000	400,000	800,000
B	104	70	108	58	44
C	2	3	4	7	
D	104	70 (+5 AR)	108	100 (Wash.	total)
1911 - A	1,900,00	720,000*	700,000	400,000	850,000
B	101	71	116	66	46
C	1	8	7	2	4
D					

A = Total Population of state.

B = Number of congregations (according to State Societies).

C = Number of churches started by aid of State Board.

D = From "Statistics of Disciples of Christ by States & Counties."

[All data gathered from the Yearbook of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)]

There is obviously a discrepancy in number of congregations listed in two different places. This is apparently due to two factors: (1) The State Societies listed the churches that were part of their fellowship, and (2) congregations (or individuals) who contributed to the national fund directly may have also been counted. One example of this type of listing is Bakersfield, California.

According to one list it is listed in northern California without a minister and an annual contribution of \$9.35 to the Church Extension Fund. In another place it is listed with southern California as a full congregation with minister and a complete set of statistics.

In 1929 the format of reporting regional statistics was changed to the format listed in Appendix B.

* Arizona began being listed separately in the 1911 Yearbook.

Appendix B

West Coast Yearbook Statistics from 1912-1990

Year Reported	Calif. North	Calif. South	Oregon	Wash. East ¹	Wash. West
1912*	82	70	105	98	
1913	98	81	142	136	
1915	95	87	132	63	70
1915**	98	89	134	66	70
1920	81 (85) [†]	80 (83)	120 (109)	61 (75)	55 (65)
1924	88 (88)	103 (103)	122 (122)	59 (59)	54 (54)
1925	87 (87)	109 (109)	122 (120)	60 (60)	58 (58)
1929	77 (65)	115 (104)	131 (131)	53 (45)	55 (53)
1930	76 (66)	124 (101)	131 (31) [†]	53 (45)	55 (53)
1934	77 (78)	121 (122)	133 (138)	101 (104)	
1935	77 (79)	120 (121)	129 (132)	102 (105)	
1939	74 (77)	118 (118)	139 (136)	99 (100)	
1940	76 (78)	120 (120)	141 (141)	99 (100)	
1944	77 (77)	136 (136)	147 (147)	93 (95)	
1945	80 (80)	141 (141)	150 (150)	96 (98)	
1949	83 (85)	149 (149)	154 (154)	105 (105)	
1950	83 (84)	150 (150)	151 (151)	106 (106)	
1954	83 (85)	172 (172)	167 (167)	116 (116)	
1955	84 (86)	172 (172)	165 (165)	116 (116)	
1959	79 (79)	183 (183)	165 (165)	120 (120)	
1960	81 (81)	185 (185)	167 (164)	125 (125)	
1964	84 (82)	188 (137)	167 (146)	120 (107)	
1965	84 (82)	190 (136)	167 (146)	120 (108)	
1968	85 (85)	157 (157)	78 (124)	115 (116)	
1969	82 (82)	146 (146)	70 (87)	103 (98)	
1970	82 (82)	146 (146)	64 (64)	102 (102)	
1973	77	130	54	91	
1984	65	121	49	83	
1985	65	120	49	83	

All data gathered from the Yearbook of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

¹ One figure shown for Washington represents statistics for the whole state as per reported in the Yearbook. Statistics reported for east and west separately reflect Yearbook entries.

* From 1912-1913 figures shown are derived from a count of actual yearbook entries (no "Summary of Stastics" available for these years). Figures shown for the year 1915 reflect both actual count and report from the "Summary of Statistics."

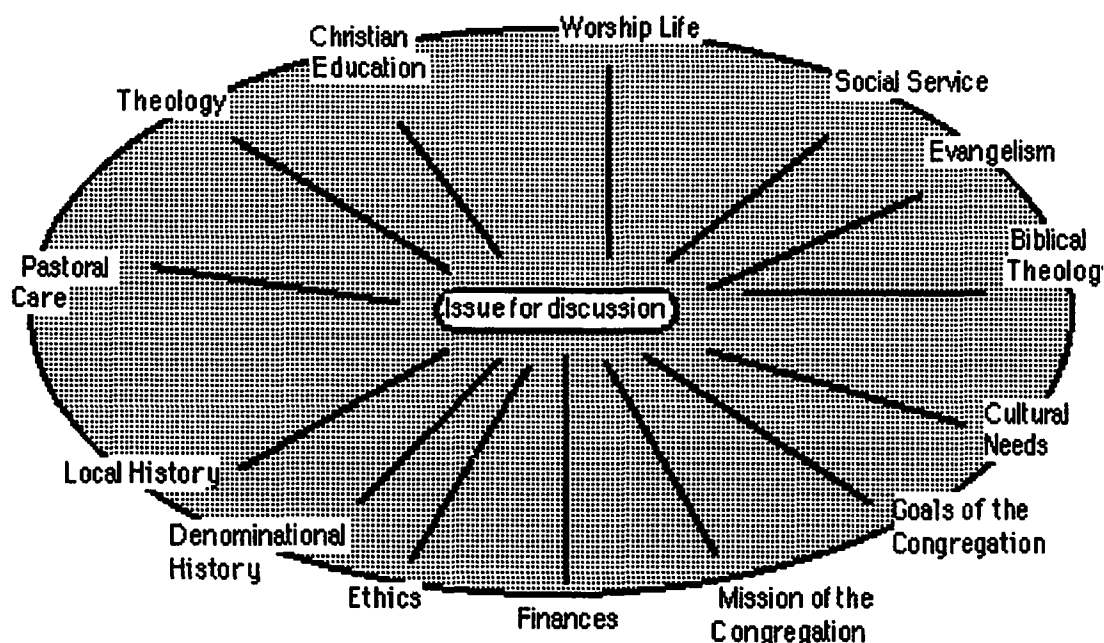
** From 1915 to present day, figures shown are derived from the Yearbook's "Summary of Stastical Features."

[†] Figures in parenthesis represent statistics reported for "Bible Schools."

*[†] Actual figure reported in Yearbook. Possibly an error.

Appendix C

A Model for Discourse



This model for discourse is used by a congregation in determining why and how it shall proceed with programs, issues, or problems which face a congregation. It is recommended for daily use in the life of a congregation.

The Mission Statement of a congregation determines the priorities and goals of a congregation. Every ministry and program of a congregation should relate directly to its Mission Statement in some way.

In this model an issue, program idea or item for discussion is (hypothetically) placed upon the pallet for discussion and examination in regards to its fulfillment of the Mission Statement and goals of the congregation. The item being examined is also discussed in relationship to the pallet which contains every element of the life of the congregation -- historical, theological, educational, etc.

For example:

* Congregation A is an established Disciple congregation located in a busy downtown neighborhood. The area in which it is located is surrounded by office buildings, and parking is at a premium. The make

up of the congregation is primarily middle aged and elderly. Congregation A has a clear Mission Statement in which is included the phrase: “. . .to educate children and adults about the love of God.” A small group of young families in the congregation suggests at a board meeting that the church ought to look into the possibility of providing day care service for members and others who work in the area. In the past the congregation has been approached by a third party that wished to locate their day care facilities in the church. The offer was rejected by the church at that time because of space limitations which no longer apply.

* In using the above model for discourse, the idea of starting a day care center would be brought to the board or committee which has authority for making such decision. the day care center would be discussed with regard to the various aspects of church life on the hypothetical pallet for discussion.

* Some of the questions asked in regard to the potential day care center would be (in no particular order of importance):

- How does this opportunity fit our Mission to teach children about God?
- Who will organize it? Run it?
- Will this new venture be a “Christian” day care center (as opposed to a “secular” one)? Would that make a difference?
- Who would be responsible for curriculum decisions?
- How much input would the ministerial staff and/or church board have in these decisions?
- Do we have the space for this kind of thing?
- What do the laws or regulations require us to do in order to modify our space to accommodate this venture?
- How would this day care center effect our tax status?
- What are the ethical implications of this decision?
- Wouldn't a more prudent use be to house the homeless of the area?
- Will this day care center be a tool for evangelism? In other words, could we actively recruit church members from the day care participants?
- How would we structure fees? Would church members get a reduced rate?
- Does our denomination have resources to help us implement such a program?
- etc.

* This list of questions would help the congregation get at the issue of starting a day care center on its premises. It would help them make a decision based upon the Mission of the congregation rather than merely on logistical or financial concerns. For instance, the congregation may well decide that its Mission clearly dictates them to start such a center even though financial road blocks will not allow such a center at the current time. In such a case, the congregation would ideally work to make the necessary financial adjustments so as to bring about the possibility of a day care center on the premises at a future date.

A process of defining and determining ministry based upon this approach would be helpful to a new congregation. It would help a new congregation keep its ministry and programs focused on its vision for Mission. It would also be a good way of helping to define that vision in a more clear and tangible way.

Appendix D
Conference Materials

New Church Development Conference (A Prototype)
January 22-23, 1993
Monte Toyon Conference Center
Aptos, California

Sponsored by the joint Committee on Church Development of The United
Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Northern
California and Nevada.

Included in this Appendix:

- Conference flyers
- Expanded Outline of Conference
- Evaluation of the event
- Letters to participants, presenters, committee members

Church Planting Conference

January 22-23, 1993

Monte Toyon Retreat Center
(near Santa Cruz)

What is it? A conference designed to help congregational leaders catch the vision of starting new churches in Northern California in the 1990s.

Who should come?

- Leaders of UCC and Disciples congregations currently under care with the Church Development Committee.
- Leaders of potential "Mother" congregations.
- Seminary students and professors.
- Persons interested in the possibility of starting a new congregation in their area.

Cost? About \$50 per person

Save the dates! More details to follow!!

Sponsored by the joint United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ Church Development Committee of Northern California-Nevada. For details contact your regional or conference minister.

CHURCH PLANTING CONFERENCE

Monte Toyon Retreat Center (near Aptos)

January 22-23, 1993,
Friday, 6 p.m. to Saturday, 4 p.m.

**New Ideas for
 New Church Establishment
 in "open forum" style**

PURPOSE: To explore a variety of approaches to the establishment of new congregations in Northern California. Current demographic research shows Northern California to be high on the list as an area for successful new church development.

METHOD: Listening and sharing; hearing and feeding back to presenters; developing a "deep pool" of resources from persons currently working and planning a variety of diverse new church models; opportunity to discuss and digest content in small groups.

WHO SHOULD COME: Leaders of UCC and Disciples congregations currently under care with Church Development Committees - Leaders of potential "mother church" congregations - seminary students and professors - Lay persons and clergy who would like to participate in a potentially dynamic exchange of "cutting edge" ideas about the church in which we serve.

COST: \$50.00 per person for Food and Lodging.

 Name _____

 Address _____

 Home Telephone _____ Church _____

Send registration form and check for \$50 to:
 Christian Church of Northern California-Nevada, 111-A Fairmount Avenue, Oakland CA 94611.

SPECIAL GUEST: Deborah Thompson,
 Director of New Church Establishment, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Indianapolis, Indiana

**CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)
 OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA-NEVADA**

and

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST/NORTHERN CALIFORNIA
 CONFERENCE**

working together as a joint New Church Development Committee

CONFERENCE OUTLINE

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this conference is to educate church leaders of the opportunities, needs and obstacles of starting new churches in Northern California; with the intent of developing leaders who have a vision for starting new congregations in the 1990s.

GOALS:

1. The primary goal of this conference was to plant the seeds of new church establishment among lay and clergy leaders of the region/conference and local congregations. (To share the motivation for starting new churches, to help leaders catch a vision of starting new churches and to encourage leaders to find creative ways of starting congregations in their particular situation.)
2. A secondary goal was to provide education (historical and practical) on the ways in which new churches are established.
3. A third goal was to create dialogue in order to expand participants knowledge on the topics of evangelism and new church establishment (especially in Northern California).

Conference Publicity was targeted toward:

1. Congregations currently in care with the church development committee
2. Potential "Mother" congregations (especially the REAL leaders of these congregations).
3. Seminary students and professors.

4. Others interested in new church establishment (general publicity)

COST: \$50.00 per person. \$37.00 per person for Church Development Committee members.

General Office Participants: Deborah Thompson with the Office of Church development at the Board of Church Extension of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was the main speaker on Friday evening. Dr. Guen Hee Yu (Department of American-Asian Ministries) with the Division of Homeland Ministries for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was one of the presenters on Saturday morning.

Conference Schedule:

Friday -

- 2:00 - Committee members meet and review conf. details.
- 5:00 - Arrival and Registration
- 6:00 - Dinner
- 7:00 - Session I: "NORTHERN CALIFORNIA -- A NEW CHURCH VISION FOR THE 90s."

Introductions & Getting Acquainted. Emphasize the purpose of this event -- Focus on the fact that leadership is the key to the success of starting new churches. "Therefore, YOU are essential!"

Worship

Singing

Prayer

Scripture Reading

Sermon

Deborah Thompson

[The purpose of this time was to give the participants a call to mission and share the vision of starting new congregations. The Committee asked Deborah to include "This is what motivates me to do this task. The scope of the task (briefly). Ask the question, 'What motivates you?'¹]

¹ NOTE TO DEBRA -- The planning committee discussed the Friday evening worship service at length and have the following input/requests for your sermon:

1) We feel Friday evening needs to focus on the WHY start new congregations (both theological and practical). The HOW will come Saturday.

- 8:15- Directed Quiet time for self reflection.(1-2 min.)
 Time for small group reflection and sharing
 A time of offering our reflections and dreams. "What's your vision for new churches?"
 Closing Hymn
 Benediction

Saturday-

- 8:00 - Breakfast
 9:00 - Worship (song and prayer)
 9:15 - Session II -- "WE'VE GOT A VISION, BUT HOW WILL WE EVER BE ABLE TO DO IT ALL?"

Introduction & setting ground rules for this session.

Panel Discussion-- Sharing by 5 individuals who are involved with successful, recent new church starts. The purpose of this session is to inform the participants of models for starting new congregations that have been used in Northern California, how they work, to what degree of success. The intent is for the participants to begin to realize "some truths about starting new churches in the 1990s," so that they can utilize these models and truths for their own situation. Each panel participant has 10 minutes (strictly enforced!!!!) to give a snapshot of how their new congregation was formed.

They were asked to focus on topics such as: theology, sources of funding, involvement of lay & clergy leaders, importance of the Mission Statement (i.e. vision), target area, audience, use of demographic research, etc.

The people on this panel include:

- Dr. Guen He Yu, Director of American-Asian Ministries with the Division of Homeland Ministries of the general offices of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
- Rev. William Cummings, Bear Creek Community Church (American Baptist), Stockton, California. (A suburban, middle class, predominantly anglo congregation which utilized a large church start approach.)
- Rev. Lorenzo Carlisle, Oakland Community Church, United Church of Christ, Oakland, California. (A black congregation in inner city Oakland.)

2) Please be clear with us that the vision you are giving is yours (or is it the denominations?). Encourage us to develop our own vision in accordance with the larger vision. What is YOUR Vision?

3) Set the Goals HIGH! (i.e. for Disciples in Northern California it is not inconceivable that we could have as many as 40 new congregations in the 1990s. The Demographic studies say we need 42!)

4) Uplift Ethnic/Minority possibilities and needs -- particularly for northern California. Why should predominantly anglo-American denominations do this?

5) What are the shifting paradigms that will help facilitate us in reaching this goal? i.e. K. Callahan says that we are now living in the mission field. What does this mean for us?

6) What scriptures speak to you about this?

- Rev. Erasto Arenas, First Philipino American Congregation, United Church of Christ, San Bruno, California. (A new church with the vision of starting many others.)
- Rev. Bill Hutchinson, New Hope Church, United Church of Christ, Sonoma, California. (A peace with justice congregation.)
- Rev. Ron Frazier, First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Stockton, California. (A relocation of a congregation from a dying, inner city setting to a suburban setting.)

The two overarching theme that appeared in this session from the presenters were: (1) the importance of the leadership having a vision; and (2) the creativity of the leadership to bring the vision to life.

10:30 - Break

10:45 - Session III - "WE'RE GOING TO THE NEW CHURCH FAIR"

Tables were set up around the room and each presenter had space to show pictures, hand out literature, share stories of what worked, what didn't, and why. Participants were encouraged to travel from table to table asking questions, getting hints, help, etc.

Noon - Lunch

1:30 - Session IV - "WHERE DO WE START?"

The purpose of this session was to provide resources for persons in local congregations who will be leaders of starting new congregations. The session was designed to help answer the questions: "What can I as a local church member do?" "What resources are available?" "What can I do now/today that will keep me from going home and doing nothing?" Small groups will resume as per Friday evening. Participants went through a process of evaluating their own interests and possibilities for starting a new congregation. They then developed a covenant with the group as to how they will follow up on this event (go home and pray, go start a new church tomorrow, etc.). Each person was then given an envelope in which to enclose their covenant. These are taken and mailed to the participants two weeks later.

Questions asked of the groups at this time were:

- 1) Share with each other your enthusiasm for New Church Establishment in Northern California now that you have participated in this conference. Has your vision changed? How? Has it grown? In what way?
- 2) What important issues, attitudes, or principles need to be on the list for New Church Establishment? What need do you have in this area?
- 3) What would help you from here? What is your next step, and how can we help you get there?
- 4) Please make a covenant with the members of your group as to how you will follow up on this event. You will be given an envelope to address and enclose your covenant in. It will be mailed to you in two weeks.

During this time evaluations of the event are also filled out and returned to the committee (see attached).

3:00 - Closing Worship and commissioning service

Song

Laying on of hands

Benediction

Evaluation Responses

1. Facilities

Facilities were adequate -- good food.
 I'm no camper, so a non-camper facility is preferable.
 Fine.
 Adequate.
 Great.
 Facility and environment is excellent; room temp. is not comfortable.
 The food was great. The bed was hard. The rooms were crowded.
 There was not enough heat in sleeping area.
 Beautiful surroundings, food was delicious and well served. It was difficult for older people who arrived later than others and found only upper bunks.
 Adequate for this one night event!
 Perfect!
 Good.
 Great
 Adequate for the purpose (did not stay overnight, so I don't know about sleeping arrangements.)
 Facility excellent - would have appreciated a sound system for speakers.
 Was difficult to hear easily, did not enjoy Miller dorm. Prefer smaller rooms, etc.
 Very good and comfortable.
 Why not Cary hall? Really hard for some to get to other halls and too full.
 We had sleepers on the floor in front of the door.
 Adequate, except Morriss Hall -- no heat.
 Food was good and they met my dietary needs. Housing and Morris Hall -- heat?
 Great for summer, not so great for winter and wet weather!

2. Did We Fulfill Our Purpose? Your Purpose?

Purposes were fulfilled; more worship would have been nice.
 This has been excellent!!! To the planners and the visioner for N.C. in Northern California. BRAVO!!
 Yes, far more than expected.
 And then some.
 Very Well!!
 Fulfilled my purpose! Encourage and inspire participants for Asian-American Ministry.
 Fulfilled for the most part but needed more talk on revitalizing existing churches. (specific).
 (no answer)
 Purpose served and met our purpose. Got us started thinking.
 Yes. My purpose "to get educated: catch some enthusiasm for NCR."
 We fulfilled our/my purpose, except we didn't get enough churches to attend.
 Committee purpose fulfilled, you did pretty well at this. I recognize the purpose was to look at the "planting" of a new church and I appreciate that focus, but I feel that there needed to be more conscious awareness of rebirth

and resurrection within existing churches/planting a new church starts within an existing congregation.

You created more excitement for NCE. You strengthened my vision of the need for NCE.

I think we raised the issue/idea which was first goal for me.

Yes.

Yes. My purpose was getting to know each other and understanding the situation.

As much as seed planting.

Yes, good stimulation and inspiration from success stories Saturday AM.

Yes, as committee member. Yes, to hear success stories.

Yes, I believe we achieved the purpose, especially in going commitment to action.

3. Most Helpful

Presenters were helpful.

N/A

Sharing.

Debbie's sermon which inspired hope! Concrete true stories of real happenings. Hymn selections, specifics.

Panel presentation.

Stories by the 6.

Hearing others success stories and getting their methods-success and failures.

Talking individually to people who had been involved in change in their own churches or had started new churches.

Stories of new church pastors, the fair for asking questions.
10 minute stories and fair.

Deborah's sermon was an excellent "kickstart." Stories of the 6 presenters. The evening small group, I was in an exceptional group.

Stories of pastors, Deborah's message.

Panel and question period following.

Hearing testimonies. Seeing and hearing from NCE committee and others who have a passion and vision for establishing new churches.

Some ideas and resources which they presented.

Time with each other and time with small groups.

"Success" session.

?

Discussion with small group.

4. Least Helpful

Small groups didn't help much.

N/A (12 answers)

?

Time (length of conference was too short).

Meditation had too much ending.

Don't ask for covenant following lunch.

Having more after lunch.

Absence of meditation materials for the pre-breakfast time.

5. Comments?

Good conference! Do at least once a year to re-awaken our churches!

Great event! Do something again.

Let's do it again!!!

Thank you!!!!

I'm grateful for this conference. There is a great hope for church growth in this region.

Should be yearly event, held in different geographic areas.

A list of resource people would be helpful.

N/A

Great idea. Partnership with UCC important and valuable to a feeling of being a team, a "grace filled" event. I appreciate sticking to the schedule and limiting the time of speakers -- it was clear that the leadership was going to assure presentations with boundaries. I feel the enthusiasm of others is crucial in this type of work.

Need to roll from here, more followers, more sessions, more participants.

Good job.

Resource table would have been helpful.

More such gatherings for information support and inspiration.

Need more variety of new planter's testimony.

One day, all day, skip overnight.

Hope new energies are implemented. Covenant could help.

N/A.

Might have been beneficial to have two days instead of 24 hours.



Arden Christian Church

Disciples of Christ

November 13, 1992

To: Debra Thompson
The Board of Church Extension
PO Box 7030
Indianapolis, IN 46207

Dear Debra,

This letter is in regard to our new church conference in Northern California in January. You will remember that we spoke about it some time ago and you cleared the date for us (January 22-23, 1993). We've gotten a little bit closer to knowing exactly what's going to happen and I want to fill you in on our plans. Attached is an outline and full set of papers on the conference. Note that we are doing this in conjunction with the United Church of Christ conference here as we are working together as one group. I understand that Luis Ferrer will not be able to make it, but we are still planning on having you and Guen Hee Yu participate.

We would like you to provide the "keynote sermon" on Friday evening. This is the main input for that evening and we would like you to set the tone and infect us with your energy! Page 5 of the attached information gives some pretty specific ideas, but we also want you to know that you have room to interpret that as you find it appropriate. Please read through this information and give me a call to discuss it. Thank you.

NOTE that this conference is intended to be a "seed planting" conference. I imagine that we will do it again next year or the year after. I'm going to be the chair of the regional commission for Church Development next year and I'm hoping we'll set a long range goal ("3 new churches in 93, 4 in 94, and 5 in 95"). We'll need many more of these conferences!

One other thing, will you consider bringing the demographic map, etc. which shows the 270 prime target areas for disciples in the 1990s? We would like to have that kind of graphic description to inspire people to this great task! Thanks!

I hope to hear from you soon.

In Christ, 
Rev. Sean P. Harry, Sr. Minister

4300 Las Cruces Way • Sacramento, Ca 95864 • (916) 483-2733



Arden Christian Church

Disciples of Christ

December 9, 1992

To: Debra Thompson
The Board of Church Extension
PO Box 7030
Indianapolis, IN 46207

Dear Debra,

This letter is a followup of the November letter which I sent you in regards to our new church conference in Northern California, January 22-23, 1993. We're looking forward to having you and Rev. Yu with us. I'm enclosing a final outline of the conference for you to study and make notes about. Please note the places that we have listed you. The purpose of this conference is to educate church leaders of the opportunities, needs and obstacles of starting new churches in Northern California with the intent of developing leaders who have a vision for starting new congregations in the 1990s. We hope to plant quite a few seeds! As you know, the task for North. California is big!

Again, at this conference we are asking that you: a) bring the keynote sermon on Friday evening around your vision for starting new churches; b) bring the demographic map which shows the 270 prime target areas for Disciples in the 1990s for use during Saturday afternoon (we'd like you and Rev. Yu to have a booth that information available); and c) ONE NEW THING -- could you give us a commissioning at the closing session? We envision this to be a prayer of laying on of hands by which we are "sent" to fulfill commitments that we are making that weekend. Thank you for sharing your gifts with us!

A couple of questions regarding the details of the General Staff involvement: 1) Do you think it would be possible for you to get ahold of some resources from CBP to sell or order at the event? 2) Do you have a scripture reference that you'd like to use on Friday evening? 3) What supplies will you need us to provide for this event? 4) I believe that Dick Lauer or someone from the Regional Office will provide transportation from and to the airport for you and Rev. Yu. Please let them know your flight information.

If you have questions about anything please let me know. I'll try to call you around the end of next week to see if I've missed anything.

In Christ,
Rev. Sean P. Harry, Sr. Minister

4300 Las Cruces Way • Sacramento, Ca 95864 • (916) 483-2733



Arden Christian Church

Disciples of Christ

December 9, 1992

To: Members of the Church Development Committee
RE: Our January Conference

Dear Friends,

I hope you're having a Merry Advent season! Christmas will soon be upon us, and then January. Wow! How time flies! With January will come the New Church Conference that we've all been working so hard on! It can't be possible! It really is almost here.

I'm sending you a final copy of the outline for the conference which is quite a bit different (in some ways) than any other copy you have yet received. Please read it over carefully and mark the things that you are suppose to do. We will not be having a Church Development Committee meeting before the event so it is extremely important that each of you read the outline and follow through on your assignments before the event! I won't have time to call you to double check, so I'll assume (unless you call me) that you have no trouble fulfilling the assignments. Thanks!

I'm also enclosing a copy of the registration flyer for you to copy, distribute, use, or whatever. I hope each of you will make one or two personal contacts with someone in your area (in addition to the ones assigned to you by this group). Get your registration in soon so we will know how many to count on.

I'm looking forward to our time together! The task of starting a significant number of new congregations in Northern California this decade is an awesome and frightening one! But unless we take the role of leaders in that task, I am convinced that it will not happen. Keep the faith! All things are possible when we are doing the Lord's work. See you in January.

In Christ,

Rev. Sean P. Harry, Sr. Minister

4300 Las Cruces Way • Sacramento, Ca 95864 • (916) 483-2733



Arden Christian Church

Disciples of Christ

December 18, 1992

Rev. William Cummings - Bear Creek Community Church
P.O. Box 690986
Stockton, CA 95269

Dear William,

Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in our New Church Establishment conference at Monte Toyon on January 22-23, 1993. We are looking forward to an excellent event and your participation will help greatly! I'm thankful that you are willing to take the time out of your busy schedule to share with us your insights and success stories!

As you are aware, the conference will begin on Friday evening with a worship time and theme setting sermon by Deborah Thompson. Deborah is the Disciples of Christ General staff person responsible for new church development. She is a remarkably exciting person and her sermon on Friday will really set the tone for a great conference! We are asking you to participate in the Saturday morning session, but you are more than welcome to take in the entire conference. We are sorry that we are not able to offer you a stipend, but we will be glad to pick up the registration costs for you and one other person. The conference starts at 6:00 p.m. on Friday and will end at 4:00 p.m. on Saturday. Monte Toyon is a beautiful facility, I know you will enjoy both the program and surroundings.

I am enclosing for you a copy of the conference outline which includes the goals of this event. We have not had great success at starting new congregations in Northern California for the last 30 years, and have forgotten both the importance of this task and the ability for God's work to be done in this way. This conference is primarily aimed at planting seeds among our people for the great task to which we are called. That is why your participation is so essential.

We have asked you to be a part of a panel of leaders who have had success at starting new congregations in this Region. As a member of that panel we are asking that you present your model for starting your new congregation at our 9:00 a.m. session. You will have ten minutes to do this -- and the time will be watched VERY CAREFULLY. Following that session there will be a "New Church Fair" at which you will have a booth. You are asked to bring with you handouts, pictures and other materials to share with the conference attendees who will be circulating throughout the fair. They will want to ask you more specific and in depth questions about what you did, why you did that, what worked best, your mission statement, etc. Please share as much as you can with our folks at this time. The success of the conference lies primarily in the ability for those in attendance to get an understanding of how and why new congregations are important. If they can leave with a sense of the possibility that they too can do something like what you have done, then our conference will have fulfilled its goals! Thank you for your willingness to share in this way.

In order for us to be prepared for your participation in the New Church Fair we will need you to send me the enclosed forms by January 5. In this letter you will find: a copy of the conference outline, goals etc; two registration forms (please fill them out for you and your helper); a response form on which you should include the name of your congregation, 3 key words about your congregation,

4300 Las Cruces Way • Sacramento, Ca 95864 • (916) 483-2733

and a list of supplies you may need (we hope you will bring your own specialized equipment -- i.e. slide projector. . .); and a self addressed stamp envelope. I appreciate your prompt response!

The Christmas season is now upon us, but January 22 will be here soon! I am looking forward to having you share with us what has made your new church successful! In the mean time I pray that your ministry will be blessed by God and that your Christmas celebration will be joyous and relaxing. Thank you again, William, for your willingness to be with us in January!

In Christ,

Rev. Sean P. Harry
Senior Minister, Arden Christian Church
Co-Chair of the New Church Development Commission



Arden Christian Church

Disciples of Christ
Friday, January 29, 1993

To: Deborah Thompson
Board of Church Extension of the Disciples of Christ
P.O. Box 7030
Indianapolis, IN 46207

Dear Deborah,

Thank you so much for presenting and participating in our new church conference last weekend! The event was terrific! You really helped set the tone with your fine sermon on Friday evening! You can see that there is tremendous opportunity and hope for starting new churches here in Northern California. I don't think we'll have much trouble getting three going in 1993. With that kind of a start it will be even easier to meet our goal of "3 in 93, 4 in 94, and 5 in 95." I hope you now see that this is really a possibility for us, and not just a wild dream. These are exciting times!

I would be glad to share information from the conference with other regions that are interested in planting seeds and sharing a vision. I think the format of the weekend was just right for generating excitement! Don't you? I hope you will share the Northern California story when you travel. Others surely could benefit from this kind of program. Also, I'll send you a copy of my D. Min. project next week when I send in the 2nd draft. It won't be in final form, but maybe it will be of use to you.

I am attaching the names of a few ministerial colleagues that have expressed interest in "starting a new church sometime in the future." They are all the finest that the Disciples have to offer, which is exciting! Since we all live on the West coast, maybe a Pastor Developer Assessment and training conference could be held out here. I also think a week is too long for these people to take for that kind of thing. They ALL have the creativity and can get the job done if they are given the task. More training than assessment would be needed in this case. Talk to them and you'll see that they are qualified! Please think about it and we can discuss it later.

Again, thank you for sharing the weekend with us! Your message was powerful and right on target. I hope you will send me a copy for my project. Also please send Don Reisinger a copy for possible publication in the next Impact. We'll see you at the General Assembly!

In Christ,

Sean P. Harry, Senior Minister

cc - Harold Watkins, Don Reisinger, Dick Lauer
4300 Las Cruces Way • Sacramento, Ca 95864 • (916) 483-2733



Arden Christian Church

Disciples of Christ
Friday, January 29, 1993

To: Dr. Guen He Yu
PO Box 1986
Indianapolis, IN 46206


Dear Dr. Yu,

Thank you for participating in the new church conference in Northern California last weekend. It was a great experience for us! Your sharing of the vision for starting new American-Asian congregations was very challenging! I hope you will keep in touch and help us to realize that challenge! As I mentioned to you at the conference, I hope you will call me personally each monthly to assess our status. Indeed, Northern California is a ripe place to start ethnic congregations, especially Asian congregations. We just don't know how to do it! I hope you will help us!

I also mentioned at the conference that you should contact my father in Oregon. He has a lot of contact with the Japanese community. There may be some possibilities there. I told him you would be in touch. His name is Thomas Richard Harry (honestly), and he goes by Dick. His phone number is (503) 287-8559. Give him a call.

Thank you again for sharing with us. I look forward to working again with you soon!

In Christ,


Sean P. Harry, Senior Minister
Co-Chair, Regional New Church Committee

4300 Las Cruces Way • Sacramento, Ca 95864 • (916) 483-2733



Arden Christian Church

Disciples of Christ

Friday, January 29, 1993

Rev. Bill Hutchinson
20735 5th Street East
Sonoma, CA 95476

Dear Bill,

Thank you for sharing your story at our new church conference last weekend! The event had a great turn out and we feel it was a success! This was, in part, due to your presentation and sharing. I hope you enjoyed it as well!

We will continue to pray for your new church venture. It isn't easy to do this work. I hope you will get some strength from knowing that our committee is in it with you. Please let us know if we can be of any help to you new church. We have very few financial resources, but we know that God will somehow provide!

Again, thank you!

In Christ,

Rev. Sean P. Harry
Senior Minister, Arden Christian Church
Co-Chair of the New Church Development Commission

4300 Las Cruces Way • Sacramento, Ca 95864 • (916) 483-2733



Church Advance Now

*Deborah R. Thompson, Director
New Congregation Establishment*

February 9, 1993

Rev. Sean P. Harry
Arden Christian Church
4300 Las Cruces Way
Sacramento, California 95864

Dear Sean:

Greetings! Thank you for your letter of January 29. I was so pleased to be a part of the event that you and your committee sponsored and was so delighted to hear your vision and your dream for New Congregation Establishment in Northern California and Nevada. In fact, I was so excited and encouraged as I left Northern California that I have shared your story with the CAN Staff and Neil Topliffe. There is a chance that the Region of Northern California will be lifted up in our 1990's CAN video which will be available at the General Assembly. Again, we are just in the planning stages so I don't want to make any definitive promises. However, the CAN Staff and Neil are extremely impressed about the ministry of New Congregation Establishment that is going forth in your Region.

I thank you for your leadership and the vision that you have given to this ministry. I thank you for your kind words also that you shared about my sermon. A copy is enclosed.

It was a blessing to be among you. I will be in touch at a later time. May God continue to bless the work that you are doing for Christ and God's Church.

In Christian Service,

Deborah R. Thompson, Director
New Congregation Establishment

mll

cc: Dick Lauer

encl.



Board of Church Extension and
Division of Homeland Ministries...
resourcing new congregations

P.O. Box 7030 Indianapolis, Indiana 46207 Phone (317) 356-6333

California Address
January, 1993

Catch the Vision...Christ for the World

It was August 28, 1963, when my family and I sat huddled together around a black and white TV set to see, to hear, to witness an historic moment in our lives and in the life of America. I can still remember the intense pride, excitement and new hope that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. brought to us, that day as we watched him deliver from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial the famous "I Have a Dream" speech. What he did for this small African-American family with two parents having grown up under the burden and the pain of discrimination and racism in the South, and who were desperately trying to make things better for their one offspring, their daughter, was to help them keep hoping, keep sharing, and keep believing for a better tomorrow. What he did for us was simply help us catch a vision for a just, inclusive, humane and free America.

It was January 20, 1993 about 12:15 p.m. Around this color TV set sat a 50 year old Hispanic woman who is an immigrant from Puerto Rico, a 64 year old white male and a 30 something African-American woman. Although we had all cheered when William Jefferson Clinton was sworn in as the 42nd President of the United States, we had been waiting to hear the poem written for the inauguration by Maya Angelou. As she read, "A Rock, A River, A Tree," we each sat silently with the words of this poem touching deeply the depths of our soul. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Margie's eyes fill with water, Vernon reaching for his handkerchief and quietly wiping his eyes and blowing his nose. I sat fixed, gazing, proud with tears silently running down my face as she closed with her last stanza, "...Here on the pulse of this new day, You may have the grace to look up and out And into your sister's eyes and into Your brother's face, your country, And say simply, very simply, with hope, Good Morning."

Like 30 years ago, I again felt the intense pride and excitement as well as a new energy and hope. Maya Angelou, a woman of African descent, like me, helped me through her witness in poetry to also catch a vision...A vision for a world, an America that values the rich heritage of all its people and celebrates all its people for who they are as they are.

It is January 22, 1993. I stand before you tonight with a new hope, a new energy and a new excitement for another vision, a vision that God has been giving to many of us across this country and Canada. Yes, for those of us in New Congregation Establishment, we see the new church movement as a central and important vehicle for implementing the vision, but it is not the vision. The vision is simply this "that each and every member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ will hear Christ's call and challenge to 'go' beyond the comfort zone of their individual congregational existence into a world that is hurting, broken, and seeking to share and live the good news of Jesus Christ."

Now I confess to you I do not have the oratorical skills of a Dr. King nor do I possess eloquent mastery of words like Maya Angelou, but my desire, commitment and resolve to communicate to our Church and to you this vision is for me no less intense, powerful and important. I want for you to Catch the Vision that Christ is for the World.

California Address
January, 1993
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My sisters and brothers, this vision is really not new, although, it will bring about new opportunities for ministry in our time. It was handed down almost 2,000 years ago. It's not mine alone, although I share it. It doesn't belong just to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or the United Church of Christ though we at least profess we already know it. This vision for reaching persons for Christ regardless of their race, color or economic condition is a vision rooted in the very heart of God, lived out through Jesus the Christ and is given to each of us passed down from generation to generation. Every gospel writer except Luke who really picks it up in Acts ends with some variation on the theme of this vision. In Acts Luke says, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth." John says, "Feed my sheep, Tend my lambs and Follow me." Mark says, "Go into all the world and preach the good news." And, of course the most famous is Matthew's account having Jesus' last words as, "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And lo I am with you always even unto the ends of the Earth."

It is that mandate from God that drives us, energizes us, and keeps us traveling around the United States and Canada, sometimes tired, but always hopeful that God will create opportunities to share the vision with particularly our Church. Therefore, I stand before you saying anew and again, we must reclaim the evangelistic imperative, the power and commitment of Peter and Campbell. We must recapture the evangelistic zeal, the passion and resolve of Paul and Stone and recognize that each of us have a responsibility to share the faith we have and to make it available in new ways so that every person can have the opportunity to respond to God's call upon their life.

As I and others come before you with this vision for New Congregation Establishment in our church, I come with the prayer that seeing the vision, catching the vision and claiming the vision will do three things.

First of all, I pray that our vision will be one which will instill a glimmer of hope in the hearts and minds of those who hear and receive it. As I travel, I get a sense of apathy in some circles about the Church in general and our church in particular. Some people see new Congregation Establishment as the last raft from a sinking ship, saying, "Well, if we are going to survive, I guess we'd better start some new churches." Some feel that this is just another denominational program, designed to take their money and then who knows where it will go. But hear me today, although I believe in the ministry and witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, and I want us to grow and improve in our witness for Christ, I do not come to you out of some bureaucratic mandate or to challenge you to reach some goal to help our church "survive" into the 21st century. Brothers and sisters, this vision is not about institutional survival or denominational self-perpetuation and self-preservation. I'm here to offer a word of hope from a God of hope, to help us give new hope to people particularly in your communities who are seeking some real meaning for their lives. People I know are looking for something and someone in which to hope. One of the gifts of the black church tradition that I value most is that of "testimony," opportunities to find hope through someone else's story. Not only am I blessed as I hear, remember and share my blessings from God but inevitably someone else is going through the same thing and gets a blessing too!

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January, 1993
page 3

Jesse Jackson said "Keep hope alive." It is hope that keeps us in the struggle and moves us to action in the changing time. But that brings me to the second thing I want to say about vision. Hopefully, vision will also initiate change.

Be ye clear, vision will initiate change and claiming and living out this vision will not only initiate change in you, it will also bring about change around you.

I have a friend who has shared her joy and frustration as the parent of a teenager. From day to day her daughter has challenged her to new levels of listening, understanding, forgiveness, mercy and love. Change will also call us to a new level of listening, understanding, forgiveness, mercy and love.

For we are living in changing times. The America we know now is not the America of 25 or even 10 years ago. In fact, sociologists tell us we will experience more change in the next 10 years than in the last 30. Think about it. Rap used to be something we did on the door and byte was something we did to a sandwich. Not anymore.

We no longer look the same. America is multi-colored, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. Minority is no longer a valid word, for people of color anyway. Soon persons of European descent will be "the minority". So our vision must not only initiate change, it must embrace it. The new mission fields are the immigrants that come to our shores, the black child/teenagers in our inner city, the refugee looking for a safe haven. And changing times requires changing ways of doing ministry.

So vision must also inspire courage to act. Courage to make mistakes and to try again. Change is never easy. Doing a new thing in a new way is never easy. (Bill Clinton is finding that out !) However, courageously we must try to initiate the new thing and be open to try new things. The most common objection I get from "church people" is "why so much emphasis on new church?" "What about established churches?" I say, "Yes. It's not either/or." The gospel was preached in the synagogues and in the market square. God needs new wineskins for the new ideas, new creativity, new vision, the new wine. The reality is most unchurched, not all, but a majority do not come to our established churches because the church is not relevant to their needs. They are angry and disappointed, disillusioned and confused.

Therefore, we must be bold in listening and responding to the new challenges and opportunities they present to us. We must be willing to stand against the institutional pressures that will call us to conform to status quo and instead seek God's new ways and new directions. The challenge in this area is to find those new ways in Northern California. Claim the courage! Risk trying new methods and new models to reach the persons who are unchurched here with a new word of hope.

Acts 16:6-10: Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

taken from the New International Version

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